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ience Fiction & Fantasy STORIES

June
1971
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E BYWORLDER—A Major New Novel
by Poul Anderson

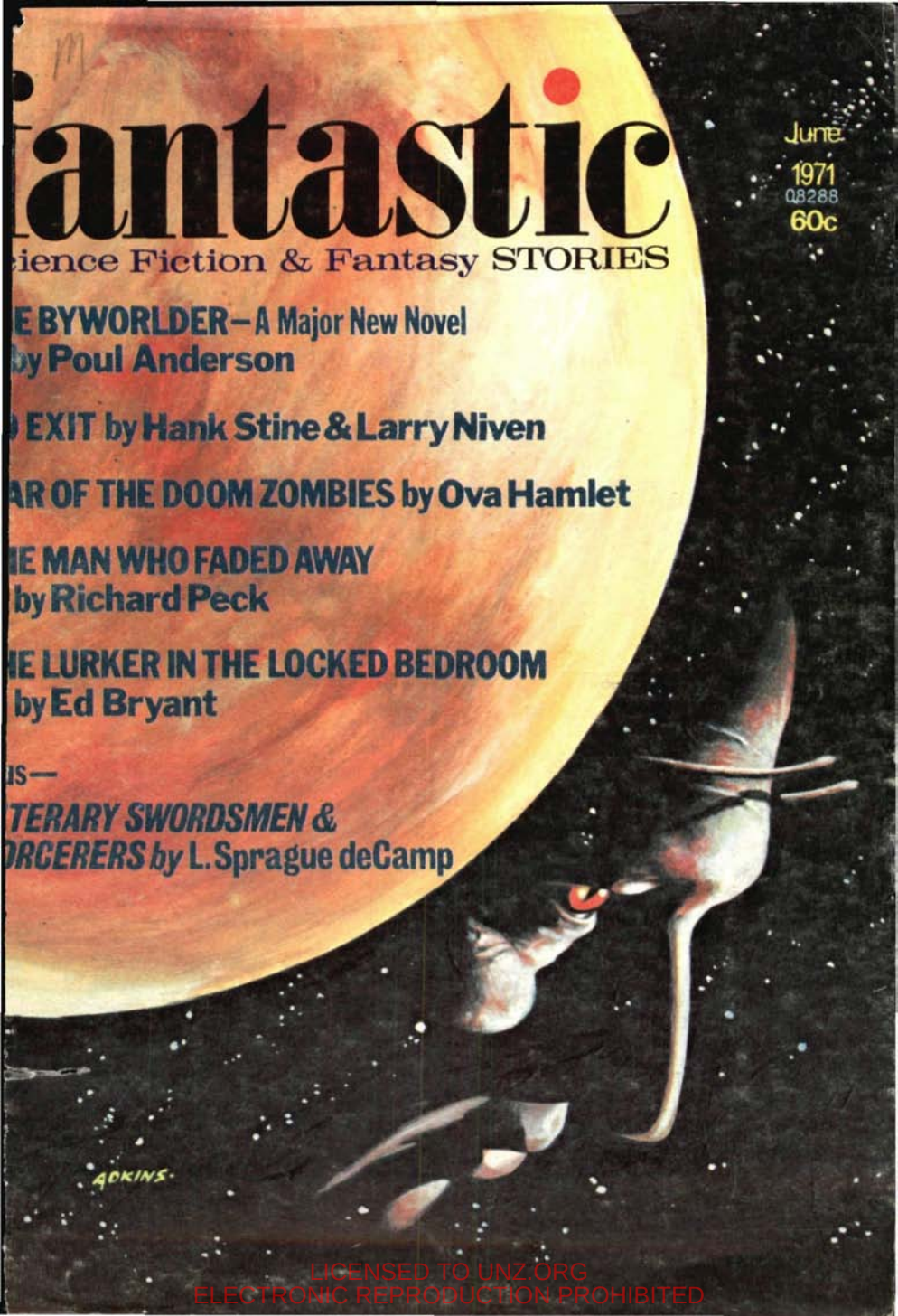
EXIT by Hank Stine & Larry Niven

AR OF THE DOOM ZOMBIES by Ova Hamlet

IE MAN WHO FADED AWAY
by Richard Peck

IE LURKER IN THE LOCKED BEDROOM
by Ed Bryant

US—
TERARY SWORDSMEN &
ORCERERS by L. Sprague deCamp



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Science Fiction & Fantasy STORIES

JUNE, 1971 Vol. 20, No. 5

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TED WHITE: EDITORIAL

Well, it's time for excuses, explanations and apologies again. No doubt most of you were a little surprised when I refered, last issue, to "our new logo on this issue"—since our cover sported the same old "square" logo after all. Put it down to a mixup at the engraver's—and tell me what you think of the brand new logo on *this* issue! It's part of our new look in repackaging, which will lead, next issue, to heavier cover stock and a better binding process.

I also said, last issue, that Mike Hinge would be taking over our art direction this issue. Unfortunately, after all our initial plans were made he found he could not—he simply didn't have the time. However, in order that we wouldn't feel rejected, Mike has done a whole flock of new cover paintings for us, some of which are guaranteed to knock you out when you see them, they're so revolutionary! (And if you want a small foretaste of what to expect, scan your paperback racks—Mike has done covers for forthcoming sf books from both Lancer and Berkley, books which should be out by the time you read this. Personally, I'm very proud that, after knocking on many publishers' doors for years in vain, Mike has finally been given the opportunity to show what he can do by these companies.) In the meantime, yours truly continues to handle the design of our covers.

In the February, 1970, issue of this magazine, I commented editorially on an article by Norman Spinrad which had appeared in *KNIGHT* magazine, in which he laid all sf's faults and tribulations at the doorstep of fandom. In the August issue, Norman rose to the rebuttal in our letter column, and offered the republication of the article here. I turned him down because I felt that a scurulous article of that sort had no place in any responsible sf magazine. Some of you took me to task for that—several readers complained that since they hadn't read the article they had no way of forming an opinion on the justice of my comments upon it. The article, "FIAWOL," has now been republished,

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primarily for this reason, in Richard Geis' excellent fanzine, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. It appears in issue #41, along with (coincidentally) a column by myself, and can be yours if you send 50¢ to Richard E. Geis, P.O. Box 3116, Santa Monica, California, 90403. (Copies of *our* back issues, such as the February and August, 1970 issues, are available for 60¢ each from the Publisher, at the address on the contents page.)

And, finally, a good many of you have complained about the missing sixteen pages in the February issue. The page-cut was not an editorial decision and was not made frivolously. Despite "soft" sales, the prices of just about everything involved in the production of a magazine have continued to go up—paper, especially. We did not have a choice: it was cut pages or raise the price again. What is unfortunate is that the page-cut coincided with a previous decision to increase the apparent size of our type (the actual loss in wordage with our larger story-type is minimal)—and with a misunderstanding with our typesetter which resulted in not only the stories but the features being set in the larger type (a mistake we corrected with the April issue). Apparently some of you felt you'd been cheated by these changes—although we still feature more actual wordage per 130-page issue than, for instance, *F&SF*, and grossly more than *THE MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, which recently went to 75¢ at 130 pages.

It is a problem which the entire field faces, and, as I've said before, each publisher must make his own decisions based upon his own circumstances. You can be sure that no one in the sf magazine business is getting rich, and we can only hope no one loses his shirt.

Poul Anderson's "The Byworlder," which begins in this issue, seems to me one of the most encouraging works of science fiction I've read in years. "Encouraging," because in it Poul offers not only what appears a viable alternative to our present culture's sicknesses, but suggests that this could easily *become* our future in the early part of the next century. The world of his novel is by no means a utopia, and in some respects (overpopulation, etc.) it's probably worse. Nations are still scheming against each other, organized crime appears more entrenched than ever, and the "georges" seem no more spirited than today's members of the "silent majority", but—

In the fragmentation of subcultures and the existence of *alternative* cultural islands in society, I think Poul has hit on the first workable way out of our present social morass. And to me, this is encouraging: I've heard so many Angry Young Men say that "It's not the duty of science fiction to supply the answers, but to ask the questions." It's good to see someone coming up with some answers. They may not turn out to be the right answers, when all is said and done, but they point in a positive and pragmatically realistic direction.

"The basic background," Poul says of "The Byworlder" in a recent letter, "i.e., the diversity of subcultures by the early part of the next century, is described in a nonfiction piece forthcoming (Lord knows when) in *PLAYBOY*." You might join me in watching for it.

Ova Hamlet's "War of the Doom Zombies," by contrast, has some of the most tangled antecedents of any story I can think of. To begin at the beginning, it was at a Disclave in the early sixties that Richard Lupoff, kidding around with

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 127)

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The Sigman ship had held its enigmatic orbit around Earth for three years now—and no one had succeeded in opening communications with it. How then might Thomas John Wayburn—sigaroon, drifter, hippie poet-artist, a Byworlder—accomplish that impossible task?

THE BYWORLDER

POUL ANDERSON

Illustrated by MIKE HINGE

(First of Two Parts)

I

THE SHIP from Sigma in the Dragon had changed orbit, inexplicably as always. Now it circled close, barely above atmosphere, a star which newscasts around the world said would rise before dawn. Many folk must have wondered, must have been a little hopeful or a little afraid; but probably few got up to witness the sight. Three blank years had somewhat blunted awe.

That did not seem to be the case in We. The coming of the ship had been more for the Theontologists than a spiritual event. Everything was supposed to be that. It had brought on a kind of spiritual crisis. Finally they integrated the ship's existence with the formal part of their religion, and the sole telescreen in We was monitored largely for whatever word might come in about it.

One among those who had spent the night in vigil blew on a conch to awaken the rest. The lowing roused Skip, too, where he slept on a pallet in the room of Urania's two small boys. He yawned, muttered a drowsy "Damn," and climbed from under his blankets. Adobe makes good insulation, but the nights get cold in northwest New Mexico and the

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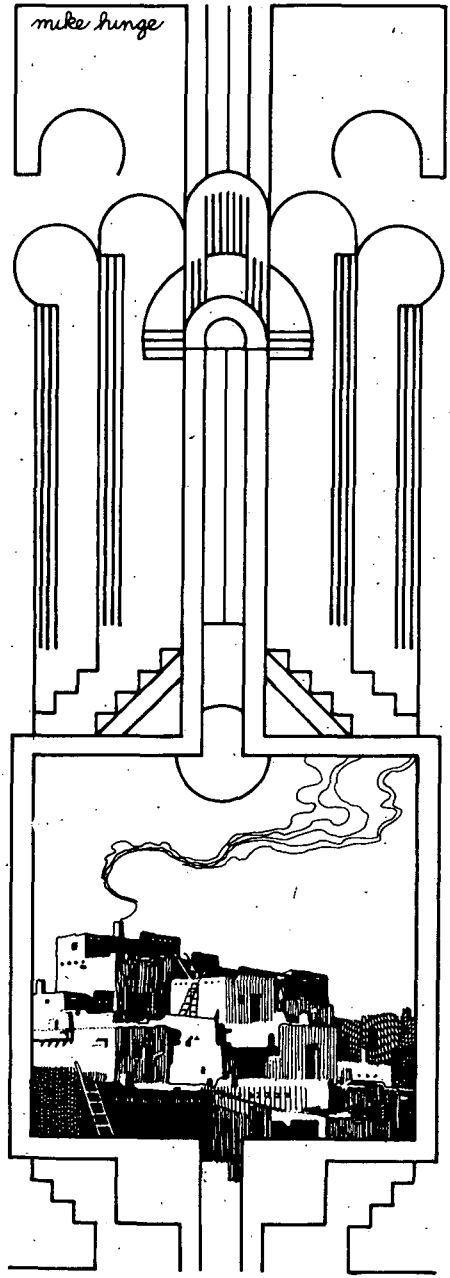
window stood open. He shivered. The air was dry in his nostrils, faintly sweetened by sagebrush smoke. He turned on the fluoros, glad he didn't have to fumble around with candles. This community might believe in the simple life, but it had the common sense to realize how simplicity depended on a selective use of technics. "Tom Swift and his electric Tibet," he had said to himself on first arriving here.

The room leaped forth in the light, handmade furniture, an outsize God's Eye hung on a whitewashed wall. Urania belonged to the Spirits cult. But she or somebody had also made humanly foolish toys for the children, and half-finished on another wall was the mural of fairytale characters that Skip was painting. This colony didn't seem to hold more than the usual proportion of stuffed shirts. Maybe less, in fact. He had been received with cheer as well as warmth.

His packsack held one good suit, dark-blue tunic and pants in the Timeless style. He didn't carry curly-toed buskins around, though, just a change of walking shoes. Passing into the main room, he found Sandalphon and Urania. The man, who was tall and richly bearded, belonged to the Jesus cult and had thus donned a black ceremonial robe, setting off a pectoral cross of turquoise-studded silver. The woman's slight form was almost lost in an Indian blanket; Skip glimpsed an ankle-length beaded gown beneath.

"Blessings," Sandalphon greeted. "I'm sorry the call interrupted your sleep."

Is that a hint? "Uh, I figured I'd tail along," Skip answered. "But of course,



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if you'd rather not have outsiders—or if you want a babysitter—"

"Nonsense!" Urania squeezed his hand. "Nothing to fear. The boys will still be tucked in when we come back. And as for the ceremonies, this is a general observance—no in-cult secrets—and you are welcome." Her pert features kindled with a smile. "Why, we might convert you."

Likelihood not bloody, Skip thought. He ducked into the bathroom. Combing his hair took little time. He wore it short, bobbed directly under the ears, to save trouble. Or at least he minimized trouble; the brown locks always seemed to go their own ways after about five minutes. He was likewise an individualist in being clean-shaven, though that was because, at age 22, he couldn't yet raise a crop of whiskers which wouldn't look as if locusts had been in it. *(Hey, a cartoon idea there.)* Otherwise he was in appearance ordinary: medium height; rather stocky; however, more agile than most; freckled face, snub nose, large green eyes.

Returning, he found Sandalphon and Urania benched at the rough plank table in the kitchen. An incense stick smoked near a teapot and three cups. Outside, the conch had been joined by a gong. Skip wondered how the kids could sleep, then decided they must be used to chanting and such at odd hours. Urania laid finger on lips and motioned him to sit. Sandalphon traced a cross in the air; she kept her gaze downward into her cup. The tea was drunk with slow ceremoniousness. It was hot, pungent, a trifle dizzying. *Probably some pot in the pot,* Skip thought.

When they were finished, Urania stopped on the way out and draped a necklace of miscellaneous shells over her guest's shoulders. No doubt each had a meaning. He'd been surprised at first by the elaborateness of ritual and symbolism in We. The village was only about ten years old. For that matter, the original preachings of what was to become Theontology had been less than three decades ago. Soon he realized that most was adapted from ancient traditions. "Our apprehension of reality is largely the construct of our own minds," Joswick wrote. "Thus anything ever imagined has truth in it, partial and distorted; it is a sign among many pointing toward that cosmic oneness we call God. Through meditation upon all these aspects, conventional and unconventional religion, myth, science, philosophy, art, all we can experience, we open our beings and may in the end hope for direct apprehension of the divine."

With frugality, hard work, and endless devotional exercises, We therefore combined ecstatic states and occasionally orgiastic rites. Withdrawn from the modern world, it nonetheless practiced up-to-date dry farming with the latest gene-tailored plants; it turned out handicrafts shrewdly designed to sell at good prices in big-city stores; and few of its dwellers seemed intolerant of anything that outsiders might choose to do.

A nice bunch, Skip thought. *Rather too george for me. I won't be staying long, especially if none of the alices will give me a gallop. But I'm glad I came.*

Urania took him by the hand. His pulses leaped. He was a bit in love with

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her. Of course, he was nearly always a bit in love with somebody.

They emerged in the single unpaved street. The adobes shouldered black against a sky still dark, still wild with crystalline stars and Milky Way. At the far end of the street, leaders were assembling their groups by a bonfire. Lanterns swayed and glowed, picking out banners, rosaries, costumes, rapt countenances, the thousand-odd adults and older children. Their feet shuffled loud in the murk, their breath smoked white in the crackling cold.

Sandalphon left to join those whose cult-lodge-token was of Jesus. Urania led Skip toward three masked, feathered dancers at the head of the Spirits' people. Their tom-toms had begun to mutter. On the way, he saw the variously clad ones who chose to seek God in Brahma, Amida Butsu, Snake, Oracle. Flute, lyre, and Gregorian chant came into the music, which somehow remained a harmonious whole. The lanterns were extinguished. In seven columns, the last for postulants, the villagers passed slowly onto the Nason's Peak trail.

The moon was down, but starlight touched gray-white vistas of cultivated fields slanting toward a stream where cottonwoods grew, of sagebrush elsewhere, boulders, a scuttering jackrabbit, a ghosting owl, majestic mountains. Skip felt his irreverent heart uplifted. The night was so huge and holy.

A half hour's climb gained the top. Here stood that altar block inscribed "To the Unknown God." The people of We placed themselves behind it, faced west, and were silent.

The spacecraft rose, and a long soft "O-o-o-oh!" broke forth.

Skip had seen the sight before, when the ship happened to be similarly near Earth. It was an endless marvel and joy to him—that beings beyond the sky had made the abyss come alive by sending an emissary in *his* lifetime. That the envoy should be so strange that three years of struggle to reach understanding only deepened bewilderment in the best minds mankind had to offer, was to him exciting, a challenge, maybe even someday a chance for him.

This hour before dawn he stood among a thousand who had come to believe that the traveler from Sigma Draconis must be a direct manifestation of God; and the coldness of the mountain night ran along his spine.

The twinkling light-point swung rapidly higher among the constellations. Skip wasn't sure whether or not he could make out the accompanying module. A few binocular lenses shimmered wan in his sight. He didn't quite dare to ask to borrow. Those folk were looking on a persona of their ultimate.

"*Hail . . . Ave . . . Om mani padme hum . . .*" The chants, the dances, the kneelings and prostrations commenced. They went on after the ship had vanished in the paling eastern heaven. Skip stood aside.

Worship ended, cult by cult. In simple unorganized fashion, the community straggled back to breakfast. Some chatted, some walked silent. The east whitened, the land came awake with light.

Skip found himself again accompanying Urania. "Where's

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Sandalphon?" he asked.

She blinked long-lashed eyes at him. A breeze stirred the hairs which had strayed from her ruddy braids. "Didn't you know? I'm sorry. He and I must each have assumed the other told you. He's been arranging to go on a month's retreat, and decided to make this the occasion of starting."

So lost in the landscape lay We that Skip must laugh. "A hermitage from that?"

She smiled in turn. Outside her orisons, and to a large extent inside them, she was a relaxed and unaffected young woman. No name change upon being received into the kiva of the Spirits could wipe out little Mary Peterson, who had once felt hollow and unhappy in Chicago. "Takes all kinds, hm? Like you. I'm curious about you, more maybe than you are about me."

He shrugged. "You've heard the official facts. Not much to them."

In the first stage of acquaintance, when she asked about him, he had said: "Thomas John Wayburn, always called Skip, I don't know why. Born and raised in Berkeley, California, comfortable middle class, father an electronics engineer, mother a computer programmer. Brother and sister stayed george. None of them are overjoyed at having a sigaroon in the family, but we aren't estranged either. I see them now and then."

"A . . . what?"

"George. Staid taxpayer type . . . Oh. You mean sigaroon? I suppose it is a newish bit of argot at that. A drifter." In haste: "Not a grifter. We have our standards—well, nothing like a fraternity exists, we only kind of think alike, live alike, junction up together when we meet—we don't beg, bully, or steal. Whoever does soon finds the rest won't have any further to do with him, if only to protect their own good name. You see, we're migratory workers, dependent on being trusted."

"I've heard about those, naturally. But you talk as if a lot more have taken up that life since I came here. Can they really find work?"

"You'd be surprised. Sure, machines are doing most of the harvesting as well as manufacturing these days. But you'd be surprised what a demand there is for odd jobs done, personal services, entertainment that doesn't come out of a tube. And, uh, we're not clinkerbrains. Some of us have college educations. I was offered a scholarship. But I didn't want to be tied down, anyway not before I'd tasted a lot of the world, so I went on the wing. If you didn't want me to decorate that room—we've been talking about, well, I'm a pretty fair carpenter, mechanic, repairman, gardener, et cetera, and I have songs to sing and stories to tell."

She had nodded thoughtfully, her gaze gone faraway, as she remembered what she had left. "I see," she murmured. "Modern material productivity can support almost any class of persons, any style of existence."

"Plenty of money floating around, for sure. I haven't yet had to exercise my right to a public works billet. That's a common stunt, though—do cleanup or whatever for just half a year. You can then get by at liberty for the next six months, if your wants are few."

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"Right. Please understand that this community doesn't disdain cybernation and machines. Without them—without income guarantee, the low price of most necessities, cheap and versatile power tools, everything technology makes possible—I doubt we could have made a go of this." She had gestured at We around her.

Now she asked: "Did you really come here for no other purpose than to see what it's like?"

"I told you that when I arrived, Urania," he answered. "I'm a subculture hopper. The subcultures are springing up like mushrooms." He frowned. "Poison toadstools among them. But plenty of good clean mushrooms, like here."

She giggled. "What a compliment! Calling me a mushroom."

"Why, uh—" Confused, he blushed.

She took his arm, pressing it against her side. "Don't be so teaseable. I want to know you better. A lot better. That's why Sandalphon decided to leave this soon."

He stopped. His heart sprang. "You . . . you mean—?"

"Yes, I do mean," she said frankly. "We don't observe formal marriage. Too much chance of complications, jealousy, a dozen kinds of distraction from the spirit. But celibacy is worse yet, isn't it?"

They kissed. The sun rose blindingly over a tall peak. A lark whistled. A few persons in sight voiced friendly cheers.

After a while Urania stepped back, flushed and breathing hard. "That's another thing you're good at, boy," she said.

"And you." Actually, she seemed naive compared to some—how many altogether, since he was fourteen?—but maybe she was shy in public, and anyhow it didn't matter, he was in love again for a time and he had a job he enjoyed and though shadows were long and blue the air had already warmed enough to bring him a sweetness of sage.

They continued downhill, hand in hand but faster than before, dancing and laughing. When they reached Urania's house, she must first ready her youngsters for school. We avoided trouble with state education authorities by keeping its own certified teachers of required subjects. Ample hours remained for Theontology.

Urania whispered she'd arranged yesterday to have today off from her share of communal labor. He needn't faunch. Besides, breakfast would be mighty welcome!

"I wanted to see the spaceship," Micah said.

His mother rumpled his hair. "Too early for you, dear. It looks like any artificial satellite."

He clouded for a storm. "I *want* to!"

"That's a wrong attitude. You're turning inward from God."

"Aw, he's only six," Skip said. "Mike, I mean, not God. I think you can see it Saturday, fella, if it's hung around. Right? Now c'mon, you bucks, get washed and dressed and I'll tell you a story while the pancakes are making."

"A Maroon Balloon story," Joel demanded at once, for Skip always made him the hero of those.

"A story 'bout the planet

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Willoughby," Micah said for similar reasons.

"No time for both," Skip pointed out. "I'll tell you about a, uh, a dragon."

While they splashed and shouted and became more or less presentable, he sat at the kitchen table, his attention half on a Urania moving about more sensuously than hitherto, half on the sketch pad he used to illustrate while he related. *A dragon . . . what about a dragon?* He drew it pot-bellied and smug-looking, so much that he put a halo above. *A most pious dragon.* Bible clutched under the right forepaw. *In fact, a saint dragon.—No. Better not. Might spoil her mood.* He changed the Bible to a piece of sheet music, wrote *"O sole mio"* in what had been the halo, and the story became that of Philibert Phiredrake, who wanted to sing on the concert stage but kept setting it aflame until two clever boys named Joel and Micah thought to install a hood, whose pipe led to a Dutch oven where the dragon's dinner could be cooked. Telling it gave him small opportunity to eat before the half-brothers had scampered out.

He reached for Urania, who dodged. "Don't paw my clean floor," she said merrily. "I want a proper meal in you. We've the entire day and night, you know." Such favors were casually exchanged. Doing away with the nuclear family had its advantages, Skip reflected, though he knew that presently he would find the togetherness of We stifling.

She started to cook for him. He sipped his coffee. Sunlight poured through the open window, soaked into mellow earth walls, glowed on a kachina pattern. Fragrance welled from the stove. She was right, he confessed; his belly was growling. Otherwise the walk had invigorated him. He felt gigantic with happiness.

"That was quite a yarn," Urania said. "I don't see how you can do it on the spur of the moment. They'll miss you when you go."

"Oh, it's nothing special," he said, touched by quick unease.

She sobered, didn't look his way, busied her hands. "I'll miss you too," she said low. "You wouldn't consider staying?"

"I wouldn't fit in. Not the religious type."

"Everybody is, at heart. That's why society is breaking in pieces . . . Yes, it is. The Ortho grows more and more frantic, hunting for pleasure, novelty, thrills, anything to numb the pain of being empty. I belonged to the Ortho myself, remember; I know. And what makes the rest break away altogether, turn their backs on the whole thing, try completely new ways to live or try to revive old ones from a past that never was? What except a search, a need, for meanings? Your sigaroons included, darling. You yourself."

"N-n-no, hardly me. I'm just an artist. I hope someday to be a good artist. That's the end of my ambitions." Skip rubbed his chin. He was not introspective by nature. "I think in the long run it'll turn out that going on the wing was right for me. Staying in a studio, reading books and gawping at TV, what does that give a buck to paint *about?*"

She did regard him. "I can't believe

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you weren't near God this dawn," she said.

Briefly a ghost of that eeriness returned. "Well . . . maybe . . . Kind of like times I've camped out, lain in my sleeping bag and looked straight up at the stars. I'd feel what a whirling tiny ball the planet is, and us nothing more than specks and flickers on it. The feeling was scary and glorious." He retreated toward the everyday. "But shucks, lady, I can't stay solemn for more'n thirty seconds in a row."

She pursued. "The mystery, Skip. That being isn't merely a foreigner in costume. It's a creature, a . . . an existence we can't comprehend. Don't you see, it shows us that science will never give more than a broken piece of understanding, even of what we can see and touch?"

The cakes were ready. She shoveled them onto his plate and sat down opposite him. He poured on molasses. *If I don't steer her off this missionary runway, it could be hours before she'll gallop. Maybe never, if she gets angry at me.* "M-m-m, what lovely proviant!" he said around a mouthful.

She sighed and reached across to stroke his hand. "I want you to win enlightenment. You deserve it."

"Not really. Look, robin, let me be honest. I respect your beliefs but they aren't mine. To me, the Sigman's behavior is, well, interesting. A problem they'll solve sooner or later. It obviously doesn't think like us, but would you expect a nonhuman to? Eventually some bright boy will find a key, and once we're through the door, I bet communication'll get established astonishingly fast."

"Unless it leaves first. Forever."

Skip nodded, his pleasure dimmed. That fear was voiced quite often as the months of bafflement mounted into years. Didn't the ship take frequent tours elsewhere, immense curves to sister planets, at speeds unmatchable by the puny craft of man's first half-century in space—yes, sometimes orbiting the sun itself, close enough for radiation to kill a human vessel—the human crew would long have been dead—wouldn't such a path at last reach, not back to Earth in weeks, but to Ginnungagap?

That technological miracles would go with it, out of man's grasp, was the smallest dread. The possibility of star travel had now been proven. But *this* generation would be denied it. Maybe the denial would outlive humankind. Skip, who always carried several paperback books and found odd moments for reading them, had seen more than one competent scientist's doubts whether machine civilization, confined to a single liveable planet, would survive many centuries.

"I'm afraid that could be," he said. "How long can we expect the chap, alone the way he, she, or it is, getting nowhere at arranging a language with us, how long a heel-cooling can we reasonably expect?"

"The trouble is," Urania said, caught up by earnestness, "they're taking too limited an approach. Sending scientists mostly, a few officers and bureaucrats and journalists. Nobody else gets invited. Hasn't it occurred to anyone that perhaps what the Sigman wants isn't to communicate

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but commune?"

"Can you do the second without the first?" Skip resigned himself to a conversation which, if not in the main line of his immediate interest, need not be dull either. "What's occurred to me is, the Sigman may not really be interested in us. Polite, I suppose we must admit. But maybe having no motives, emotions, purposes in common with us. Though damn it, you'd think their being a species who build starships, like we hope to, you'd think that shows the reason for making the trip is one we could see. If—"

And his mouth fell open, his fork clattered to the table, he let out a yell which brought Urania scrambling frightened to her feet.

II

AFTER A WEEK, the vessel returned to its usual Earth orbit. The manned satellites reported it was englobed for an hour in a rainbow ripple of luminance. That meant the Sigman would receive visitors: almost the sole signal which men believed they had unambiguously decoded. Because those welcomes never lasted more than a few days, spacecraft and personnel were kept on standby, according to schemes which had formerly been the subject of fierce scholarly and political wrangling. Nowadays assignments were made on a somewhat more rational basis.

Not that that said anything very noble about Homo Sapiens, Yvonne Canter reflected. (Meanwhile she scrambled into a coverall, grabbed the bag she always kept packed, closed her apartment, took the elevator 50 floors down to the conurb's garage, set the pilot of her car for Armstrong Base, lit a cigarette and tried to relax. She did not succeed.) Three years of frustration had drained most of the prestige, professional or international, out of being personally on the scene. Besides, everything that happened was fully recorded in every feasible way and put on the open data lines. You could mull it over in the comfort and privacy of your office and have as good a chance of getting a publishable paper as did the poor devils who'd sweated to gather such a maddeningly tiny and vague increment of information.

That's what they think, Yvonne told herself. *Doubtless they've been right hitherto. But this time, oh, this time, maybe*—The blood beat high within her.

The Denver streets were only thinly in use at 5 a.m. Traffic Control's computers steered the car out of town in short order. When their electronic writ no longer ran, the pilot opened fuel cells to maximum, till the electrics whined aloud, and made the 300-odd kilometer run inside of 90 minutes. Yvonne hardly noticed the flat agricultural landscape reel by, nor the sprawling complex through which she finally rolled.

The observation did cross a mind otherwise churning with plans: Not alone Armstrong, the working spaceport, had lost glamour. The same had happened to Kennedy's R & D—to all of man's astronautical facilities. With a starship overhead, you continued ferrying supplies to the

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Lunar and Martian stations, you continued organizing a Jupiter expedition, you spoke of sending men to Saturn; but your heart wasn't in it.

She came back to alertness when she sat before Colonel Almeida's desk for briefing. Liftoff was set at 9:45; she'd arrive first by two hours—"I forgot. Who else is coming?"

"Just Wang," he told her. "The Europeans haven't finished repairs after the *Copernicus* crash, you know. We offered to carry Duclos or whoever for them, but they declined. I suspect they've about decided to save their money and use second-hand material. The Russians—um—they informed Center that Serov is ill and no substitute immediately available, therefore they'll sit this dance out. My guess is they're hurting more from their last fiscal crisis than they care to admit."

"Wang and me? Well . . . at least we'll be less crowded."

Almeida studied her. She was a tall woman, slender verging on thinness, though ordinarily her careful dressing and grooming brought a number of excellent features to notice. Her face was likewise rather long and thin: high cheekbones, curved nose, pointed chin, a structure attractive in its way and brought alive by the full mouth, the lustrous dark eyes under arching brows, a complexion to which no one of her age, 30, had a legal right. The coverall and the normally shoulder-length black hair drawn into a severe bun did her less than justice.

"I didn't realize Wang annoyed you," the intelligence officer said slowly.

She laughed. "On camera the whole time, who makes a pass at whom? Besides, he's robotically correct." Seriously, a touch hesitantly: "No, nothing to complain about. I shouldn't have spoken. He's simply not cheerful company. Under that stiff surface he's too tense, or should I say intense? You feel he never stops watching you, calculating what you'll do next. It gets on the nerves."

Almeida refrained from answering that she had given him an exaggerated description of his impression of her own personality. Her standoffishness, her half fanatical concentration on work at hand, made him wonder if she had anyone you might call a close friend . . . Parents and other kin back east, Berdt, Jewish name, didn't that suggest she had a warm place to fly back to? Or had Professor and Mrs. Berdt taken over-much pride in their brilliant girl, unwittingly driving her from them by urging her without pause toward achievement? . . . Almeida doubted Yvonne had had any bed partner in her life except her husband, and that marriage disintegrated within five years . . . two years ago, right? . . . She'd joined the Sigman project shortly before.

He recalled his attention to her: "No worries, Andy. I'll be too busy to notice, this time."

"What? You have a lead?"

"Maybe. A thought that came to me after the last session. I've been working with it since, and a pattern does finally seem—to be emerging." Enthusiasm made her suddenly beautiful. But she closed her lips and shook her head. "I'd prefer to say no more until I've tried

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the idea out."

Almeida tugged his military Vandyke beard. "You've noted it, haven't you, in case of, um, accidents?"

"Certainly. In my study at home, with the rest of my papers." Yvonne rose. "If we're finished here, I'd like a bite to eat."

She couldn't imagine she would ever weary of the sight as her pilot maneuvered toward rendezvous.

In the left window, ten degrees wide at 75,000 kilometers' remove, Earth glowed against the dark. Dayside was a hundred rich shades of blue, swirled over by dazzling pure whitenesses that were weather. The blurred greenish-brown glimpses of land were unidentifiable by her, as if she had already left for shores never trodden. Nightside was black, overlaid with faint shimmers, dancing with brief sparks that might be thunderstorms or might be cities.

Turning her glance away and letting pupils expand after that lambence, she found stars. Because of cabin illumination, they were actually no more than you might see from Pike's Peak, but unwinking and wintry sharp. Athwart them floated the ship they had sent.

What you saw there was likewise fragmentary. The craft was—perhaps—more an interplay of enigmatic huge forcefields than it was metal, crystal, and synthetic. You saw two spheroids, shining coppery in color. The larger, some hundred meters across, was entirely enclosed. From the hull protruded turrets, needles, discs, frames, domes, webs, less nameable objects, at whose functions you could merely guess. They made no ugly chaos. Instead, the shapes and masses had a flowing, breathtaking unity, never static because the eye kept finding new angles, the mind new aspects; Parthenon, Chartres Cathedral, Taj Mahal, Taliesin West could not match this intricate simplicity, this serene dynamism.

About two kilometers aft, locked in place by hydromagnetics (?), a smaller, less spectacularly equipped globe was of skeletal construction, open to the void. Telescopes revealed a pattern which Yvonne couldn't help thinking had charm, playfulness. Yet around it could burn the energies that shape suns. Astronomers had picked out the monstrous blaze of the ship, as it decelerated toward the Solar System, a light-year away. For a year and three quarters that running star had waxed, while perplexity and anxiety on Earth bred panic often exploding into riot. Yvonne remembered anew how the calm words of Sigurdsen's famous television lecture had turned her own tension to hope, yes, exuberance.

"—beyond doubt a spaceship from another planetary system. R. W. Bussard suggested back in the last century the principle it must be using. Interstellar space is not a total vacuum. In this galactic neighborhood, the gas amounts to about one hydrogen atom per cubic centimeter. Little indeed! However, when you travel at speeds comparable to light's—light speed, the never-quite-reachable maximum which the laws of relativity physics permit—when you travel that fast,

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those few atoms, colliding with your ship, will release X-rays and charged particles in such lethal concentration that no material shielding can protect you from nearly instant death.

"No *material* shielding. But we have learned something ourselves about electromagnetic and nuclear forces. The reactor which probably supplies the electricity for your home uses those forces to contain a plasma of hydrogen atoms which move so violently that they fuse to make helium and thus generate power. Bussard theorized that similar forces, on a vast scale, might someday deflect interstellar gas at a safe distance from a starship. He went on to propose that, since the gas was under control, it could be channeled aft, could be made to undergo fusion reactions and thereby power the ship. In other words, a Bussard vessel would 'live off the country.' Needing only a modest amount of fuel to get up to ram jet velocity, it could thereafter approach indefinitely close to the ultimate speed. So we could reach the nearer stars, not in millennia but in a mere few years. The gates of the universe would swing wide for humanity.

"Well, we've been anticipated by a more advanced civilization. That body has to be a Bussard-type vessel. No reasonable alternative explanation has been suggested, among the hundreds that have been made. It is a spacecraft, coming in at about one-third gravity negative acceleration, which hints that the crew hails from a smaller planet than Earth. The chances are it comes from a nearby system, quite likely to investigate the curious radio emissions its builders have been detecting from us for the past century. If so, judging by its present course, the most plausible origin is Sigma Draconis. This is a star not unlike Sol, a little more than 18 light-years distant. We shall see.

"We shall have nothing to fear. On the contrary, we have a cosmos to gain. I know a few of my colleagues worry about the ship's photon drive. Apparently it does not expel matter for thrust. It does still another thing we have not learned how to do. It uses an enormous gas laser to project radiation, a beam of photons, the most efficient kind of reaction motor we can imagine. If a beam of that intensity struck any part of Earth, the devastation would be beyond our imagining.

"*This will not happen.* I agree with those who hold that star-exploring civilizations must be peaceful, because otherwise they would have destroyed themselves before reaching the required level of technology. We ourselves, primitive though we are, have been forced—slowly, reluctantly, but forced by stark necessity—to create a measure of international stability, international arms control. I do not believe we will fall back into the nightmare condition of nuclear rockets ready to fire. I believe our children and grandchildren will go beyond today's uneasy, often surly limited cooperation, toward positive benignity.

"However, we don't need faith to reassure us about our visitors. They may not be saints, but they cannot be idiots. The least of interstellar distances is an immensity we can denumerate but can never conceive. That is no fleet

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approaching us, it is a solitary ship—by all indications, smaller than many of ours. Nonetheless it represents an achievement and an investment to beggar the Pyramids, the Great Wall, and the exploration of the Solar System. What can its crew gain by harming us? What loot can be worth a fraction of the freight charges, what population pressures can be relieved an iota, what ego gratification lies in attacking the defenseless after one has conquered the chasm?

"No, those travelers can only have a single prime desire—knowledge. Adventure and glory too, perhaps, but surely knowledge. And there, I trust, we are not hopelessly outclassed. We have information about entire worlds, planetography, biology, history, anthropology, everything we are and have been, to trade for what they can reveal to us.

"In fact, to be honest, what puzzles me is why the ship has come at all. It would be enormously easier and cheaper to exchange information by laser beams or the like. Obviously the builders of that vessel could have punched a signal here which would attract our notice.

"Are they too impatient for knowledge? It would take many lifetimes to establish a satisfactory mutual language, when 36 years must pass between question asked and answer received. A preliminary in-the-flesh expedition could lay the groundwork far more quickly. Thereafter we could indeed use interstellar television. Maybe the Sigma Draconians, if that is their home, have just this one craft, their ambassador to star after star.

"That's merely a guess, of course. I can't wait to learn the truth! Meanwhile, be assured our visitors will take due precautions. They will shut off their dangerous photon engine at the fringes of the Solar System and come in on a suitable drive—probably, I think, a superior version of our ion jet. And they will come in the same peace as the angels came to Bethlehem.

"Children of man, make ready for your guests."

He was right about the alien's harmlessness. But everything else—! And I've since wondered about the harmlessness. What has the cruel, cruel disappointment done to our poor, already sick and divided race? Eagerness returned. *Will I, I, here and now, really find the beginning of the way to lift it?*

"Steady . . . Roll three degrees . . . Twelve gauss, wow, let's pull off a ways . . . Raise thrust six newtons . . . Bearing ten, zero, two and a half; range eight-point-four . . . Cut."

Silence, free falling, stars in the windows.

The pilot yawned and stretched. "Okay, Dr. Canter, here's your stop," he said prosaically. "Want to rest a while?"

"No, thank you." She shivered. "At once." A second later she remembered to add, "Please."

The co-pilot nodded. "I'll take you." He unbuckled together with her. Already spacesuited, they made their final checks, secured jetpacks on shoulders, closed helmets, and cycled

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out the airlock.

Yvonne wished briefly she could cross alone to the ship, amidst the now undimmed splendor of the stars. But no. While her training after she joined the project was intensive, it had not equipped her to meet an emergency in raw space. Linked by a cord to the man's ankles, she hung onto her box of food and other supplies and let him tow her. He went slowly, cautiously, constantly taking sights with his dromometer, to keep them in the tunnel that the Sigman had, for a time, opened in the forces around the vessel. Nevertheless, the humans brushed these more than once. It felt like pulling through a swift current of hot water. Deeper in, at full intensity, an invader would doubtless have been torn apart.

At the shivering translucent curtain of . . . different energies . . . which covered a portal that had dilated in the hull, they stopped. The co-pilot unsnapped the lifeline from her suit, his free hand keeping a grip on her. Earthlight, reflected off his helmet, made him faceless, and a seething of static distorted his radio voice, as they hung for a moment there between stars and argosy. "Okay?" he asked.

"Yes."

"We'll—don't forget, we'll trail you in orbit. When you're ready to leave, when he dismisses you and flashes the signal, we'll haul around to the present configuration. Wait here for me to come escort you back."

"I'm not as new to these assignments as you seem to be!" she rapped. Recognizing her discourtesy, she made herself add, "No offense meant. Excuse me. I want to get right to work. An extra minute could be precious."

"Sure." He released her. She tapped a control and jetted forward, through the curtain that let her pass but not the ship's air, inboard to confront the Sigman.

III

THOUGH HE BURNED to be off with the word that had come to him, Skip finished the mural as promised. His categorical imperative was: "Always leave a clean camp." Urania and the boys kept dropping wistful hints about his staying longer, and they cried when he said goodbye. He didn't take it too hard, especially since his feet would soon have gotten itchy regardless. "I'll try to come back," he said. Maybe he would at that.

A man bound into town for supplies gave him a lift. "Town" was a dozen houses, a couple of stores, a charging station, and a bar. Skip made a dive for the last of these. They only used intoxicants for religious purposes in We. After he came up, snorting and blowing, he put questions to the proprietor. Over his second beer he did some travel arithmetic.

Normally he would have hitchhiked. They still had elbow room in these parts, and thus less reason to be wary of their fellow men than most of Earth's poor rat-frenetic seven-plus billion. He'd have talked with them, asked about things, stopped at wherever looked interesting, often on impulse changed his whole destination. But now he was in a hurry. We's

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multiplex Lord knew when the Sigman would get tired and leave, and it'd take Skip a while to reach the President of the United States or the High Commissioner of the Peace Authority or whoever else turned out to be appropriate.

Let's count the jingle again. Urania hadn't paid much. There was hardly more personal money per capita in We than in the average sigaroon junction. He hadn't cared, then. Adding the sum to what was in his pockets on arrival—*Damn, that C-coin's in old dollars; divide by a thousand and get a dime*—he reached a total of $233.50. And he must buy food and drink as well as tickets; and these two brews had already set him back four bucks . . . *Call Berkeley? Ask Dad to transfer a bit of credit? He'd be glad to oblige.* Skip grimaced. *No.* He hated indebtedness, and the moral part he could never pay, since he had no intention of going george.

He decided to invest in a retrieval. The public phone was about the only modern item in the pleasant, cool and dim archaism of the tavern: so up-to-date that it didn't take coins. If Skip had put his credit card in the slot, the No Funds bulb would have kindled in its unnecessarily snotty fashion. He borrowed the proprietor's, after showing he had cash to cover charges. The phone screen lit with a recording, a pretty girl whose smile was probably just as automatic in the flesh. "Data service. May we help you?"

He punched out essential words on the keyboard to avoid bringing in an expensive live operator. Elsewhere on the continent, a computer routed the inquiry to the appropriate memory bank; electron beams scanned giant molecules and drew forth the information contained in their distortions; after a minute's wait—channels must be crowded today—the recording said, "Your answer is ready. Do you wish a printout?"

"No, thanks," Skip said, his natural memory being cheaper. He wondered why he thanked these gadgets. Words unrolled on the screen, slowly until he turned the speed knob.

What Keeper caravans are where? Reply: Morgan's in Connecticut on an erosion contract; the Friends of Earth reforesting in Wisconsin; the Terrans on a rescue mission clear off in Egypt, along with several similar outfits from other countries, under aegis of the Environment Authority; Commonweal doing flood control in Alabama—

When the screen blanked, Skip paid the proprietor and returned to his beer and calculations. He'd worked for the Terrans last year, was well thought of among them, had hoped their chief would give him his first boost toward his goal. But he'd not make it to Egypt on the wing in any reasonable time, and he'd have the problem of getting back. *Besides, I don't want to go. News pictures are as much as I can take of what happens when the ecology of an overcrowded land collapses.* The Tuatha de Danaan were nearest, at Lake Tahoe, but who was he to them? He'd have to enroll in their auxiliaries and spend six months proving himself before he could likely get a recommendation to someone really influential.

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No, wait. He'd followed the Tahoe job with interest. It involved more than restoring purity of waters and the wilderness around them. It covered that whole part of the Sierra. Besides watershed, wildlife, timber, and recreation, agriculture was in the plans. Carefully located farms, crops and techniques lately developed for uplands, would not simply throw a little extra food into the world's ever hungrier gape. They could make a positive contribution toward maintaining nature's balance, and the owners could double as wardens. Small, isolated, such a spread was made to order for a Freeman—and the government had promised homesteading rights to qualified persons who worked for the duration of the project—and the nearest Freemen to Tahoe were those in Mendocino County, who were Skip's friends—

"Hey, bartender, you know if anybody's driving north today?"

The bus was crowded. Most things were, around population centers. Mosiah hadn't lasted long as a shiny decent-sized New Town; the Salt Lake City-Provo octopus engulfed it. This ride being express, straight through to Reno, Skip had no great hope of shaking the bore who had settled next to him.

"—barbarism," said the gray man. "Not decadence, barbarism. You're an example, if you'll pardon me. Not your fault. A factory turned you out, not a school, most certainly not a college. And why?" He tapped his seatmate's knee. "Because nobody cares. No respect for learning, scholarship, humanities; hardly any surviving awareness that such phenomena ever existed."

Skip sighed and looked out the window. The bus boomed over a land once again blessedly empty. Through dust kicked up by the air-cushion drive, Skip saw alkali-white ground thinly strewn with sagebrush, distant bluish-brown mountains, a couple of buzzards wheeling far aloft. He wished the window could be opened or at least weren't self-darkening—hot pungent air, incandescent sunlight . . . A contrail crossed heaven, and another and another. He wished he could afford a first-class jet. Or a jumbo—no less a cattle car than this, but it would liberate him faster.

"You haven't been educated, you've been processed," said the gray man.

Skip debated whether to show him the paperback of Robinson Jeffers in his tunic pocket. No, that might encourage him. *Well, shall I slap him in the face with the truth? Something like:*

—My parents, sir, explained the situation to me, I believe correctly. They are intelligent, open-minded people who give thought to what they experience. I differ from them but that does not diminish my respect for their brains.

—As children they witnessed the last fashionable radicalism and youthism. For years thereafter they heard aging members of the Now Generation lament how the ungrateful young rejected the wisdom of their elders. My parents' own generation, however, was too busy surviving for capitalized Causes: too busy surviving

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intellectually, sometimes physically, in schools more crowded, more explosively mixed, for each year that passed. Sir, how could the children of the poor at first, but presently the children of all except the very rich, be taught anything, unless a fresh look was taken at the problem, unless every philosopher of education from Plato to Dewey was called into scientific question, unless an engineering approach threw overboard that metaphor misnamed 'psychology' and applied the findings of rigorous research on man as a whole organism?

—The teaching machine was a mere beginning. Psychophysiological conditioning followed. Subliminal exposure was the aspect that roused most controversy, but simpler and subtler approaches went deeper. For instance, after it was found what is the most effective kind of positive reinforcement—reward, if you choose—for a child's giving the right response, the rate of learning and retention skyrocketed.

—Yes, indeed, most education today, clear through college, is just another technology. And I am glad. It has saved me years of ennui, out of these too few that I was granted.

—Your problem, sir, is that you were born too late. You are a professor in an era when academe is no longer taken seriously. The researchers have been lured away by industry and government. The rare genuine, born teacher necessarily restricts the number of his disciples. You have the title, you are equipped with a full battery of platitudes, but none except a pathetic handful like yourself pay attention. In the public mind, educators have been relegated to the skilled-technician class, along with repairmen, police officers, doctors, astronauts—

No. That would be too cruel. Skip contented himself with saying, "Don't ask me. I'm only a vagabond."

"You've given up the struggle, then."

Skip shrugged. "What's to struggle for?"

The professor pinched his lips together. "The sense of drift, as Toynbee wrote. Why strive, when the current sweeps us helpless toward the brink?" He leaned close. The abrupt intensity of his stare and his tone astounded Skip. "We might have coped with the machine," he declared. "We might have hoped for a renaissance after the dark age descending on us. But not when that devil's ship pollutes our sky."

"Huh?"

"The alien. The Sigman. The thing from outside. Don't you see, however inhuman, a machine is nevertheless a product of humanity? But this being, this monster . . . obscenely hideous, its very body a jeer at man . . . the incalculable power, the arrogance of Satan—no, worse than that, for Satan is at least a human archetype—and we make a god of it, in some instances literally—we rack our best brains, we spend billions of dollars that could feed starving children—on Moloch, on trying to twist ourselves into so inhuman a way of thinking that we can converse with Moloch in his own language and semantics!"

The professor drew breath. He

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leaned back and said more levelly: "Oh, I know the arguments about the Sigman's peacefulness. I'm not convinced. Still, they might be correct. Don't you see, though, it doesn't matter? The Sigman is the epitome of the final dehumanization. Whether we die or become slaves or flesh-and-blood robots or two-legged caricatures of Sigmans, makes no difference. *Man* will be gone from the universe."

"What do you suggest?" Skip ventured. "We should ignore that ship till the pilot quits and goes home?"

"We should destroy it," said the professor, and now he spoke quite calmly. "I would be proud, no, joyful to smuggle an atomic bomb aboard and detonate it."

Frustration breeds fanatics, Skip decided.

It came to him that he'd heard more paranoia about the ship than you might expect, especially from low-rank members of the Ortho like this fellow. The remarks had made no special impression on him, since he generally avoided extended conversations with persons he found dreary. And what was drearier than the class which his seatmate typified?

They didn't have the talent to become high-paid managers, engineers, scientists, politicians, any of the professionals who, with spit and baling wire, kept civilization somehow creaking along. Nor could they become the equally expensive entertainers who lubricated the machine. They were routineers, who rarely had much to offer that a computer-effector hookup couldn't supply better.

No doubt morality as well as timidity kept them from dropping down to the Underworld. But lack of originality as well as lack of nerve restrained them from joining any Byworld subculture, let alone starting a new one. In a pathetic and, to Skip, fairly horrible manner, these shopkeepers, clerks, office flunkies, holders of titles that the real Ortho hadn't gotten around to abolishing, continued to ape their masters and tell themselves that they too were essential.

The wonder was that hatreds did not ferment in more of their brains. Public opinion polls said a large majority of Americans were pro-Sigman.

Hm. How reliable are the polls, in a country as kaleidoscopic as this'n's become? And what about foreign countries? And how many minds have changed, after three years of negative? And what demagogue might find here the exact issue he needs?

Yes, I'd better hustle.

Currently the Tuatha de Danaan were on the south shore of Lake Tahoe, which most urgently needed them. The hordes who had defeated every earlier attempt at rehabilitation were gone. The resorts and clip joints which drew them had been razed, after the inmates had been redistributed in various New Towns. Condemnation proceedings never had been much of a political hurdle since California's Central Valley turned into malodorous desert. Nor was new topsoil hard to come by, what with container dumps bio-degrading everywhere you went. But the soil must be distributed, fertilized, watered, planted to the right species. When that first, quick-growing lot of trees and

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bushes had made a forest of sorts, the first kinds of wildlife must be introduced. Meanwhile you worked your way around the banks. And processing the entire lake, to get rid of contaminants and algae, would take years.

The camp didn't welcome tourists, but applications for employment were solicited. Skip told a guard jokes for an hour and won a pass to "look around and see if I might fit in." Two more hours of sauntering, gabbing, and inquiring led him to Roger Neal, whom he'd known in Mendocino.

The younger-son Freeman was working for an eventual hearth and home-acre of his own. His assignment was to a less pastoral scene than close to the fence, where trees remained and a few entomological technicians were stocking bugs that attacked plant pests. Here, on a steep red slope, bulldozers rumbled, dirtspreaders upchucked, graders whuffled, a hundred men swarmed and shouted above the noise. Most of that racket came from the water, where it roared down the tubes of barge-mounted processors and spouted back, white under a brilliant sun. Yet locally the lake was glittering again, jewel blue; and kilometers away, scars hidden by distance, peaks held forth a promise of what might someday come back.

Might, Skip had thought. *I dunno. India, Egypt, half China . . . . oh, huge chunks of this planet—Who says North America hasn't already gone too far down that same road? If some of us, a few of us, could start fresh on a new world—*

Roger, muscular, sunburned, his work clothes muddied, shook hands vigorously. "Great to see you! Gonna sign on? 'Fraid we can't have another Night of the Barn—no girls here—but a weekend in Hangtown, these days, is something to remember. What you been doing, horn? Bet you got a million yarns to spin. Bet four of 'em are true."

Skip grinned. He had first met Rog when, at 15, his chronic restlessness led him to a summer job on that farm. He had found the Freemen pretty straitlaced. They were, in fact, still another utopian movement, attempting to restore the independent, patriarchal yeoman on a basis of modern agronomics, cheap and sophisticated equipment, abundant power, easy electronic communication with the outside world. The Night of the Barn had called on Skip's full resources of generalship and deviousness to arrange. None of the adults having ever learned about it, he remained welcome among the Mendocino colonists and could always pick up a little jingle odd-jobbing for them.

"Five," he said. "You forgot the normal kind. What do you mean, no girls? Wild, glamorous Keeper women—where's your initiative?"

"Too big a ratio of auxiliaries to cadre, this project. Too much competition. Hangtown's easier. I will say, though, on fiesta nights, watching those alices dance amongst the fires—yeah, I'll stay in camp for that."

Skip nodded, recalling his time among the Terrans. Keepers, full-time conservers and restorers, might live in mobile houses of necessity; a man on a

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task of months or years would want his family around, and kids could get their formal education via multiple-hookup two-way screens. The nomad communities might thus become close-knit; they might come to view what they did romantically, almost religiously, as the most important work on Earth; they would develop their special folkways; yes, all quite natural. But Skip suspected that the gypsy-like overtones, the holidays where ceremony and conviviality flowed together, the plangent songs, the colorful garb . . . had their growth not been forced a wee bit? An extra inducement for outside help?

No matter. He'd enjoyed himself.

"I'm not after a billet, Rog," he said. "I'd like to talk with you when you get off."

"Sure. Spend the night. The food's okay. I'll sign a chit for you. You can spread your sack on my bunkhouse floor, or on the ground if you prefer. My mates'll be delighted."

Skip made himself unobtrusive till the 5:30 whistle blew. The Keepers' help had no objections to a 40-hour week. Overtime pay was welcome when there wasn't much to do in camp but earn it.

He explained his errand. Rog didn't have immediate access to Chief Keough, but his foreman did. Skip spent the evening winning over the foreman, which wasn't hard. The fellow was fresh from Alaska, where you rarely met a sigaroon, so to him the song-jape-story routine was enchanting. He gladly made an appointment on Skip's behalf "to talk about an idea that might be useful."

Daniel Keough, next noon, was a different case. He'd seen hundreds like his visitor. His courtesy was gruff. "Sit yourself, Mr. Wayburn. I'm afraid I can't spare you a lot of time."

Skip eased into a folding chair, like the one which held Keough's huge frame. Working or no, the chief wore fringed pants, embroidered tunic, red sash and beret, silver on neck and wrists. His wife and daughters, flitting in and out of the dirigible dwelling, were still more gaudy. The latter cast glances at Skip which made him wish he could stay. Around, pines climbed green into blue heaven. A butterfly cruised through sun-speckled sweet-smelling shadows, a bird whistled, a squirrel ran fiery up a bole. Distantly came the noise of the machines that sought to bring this back everywhere.

"Reckon I'll have to convince you fast, sir."

Keough puffed his pipe and waited.

"I want to see President Braverman," Skip said. "Or Commissioner Uchida or somebody like that, somebody at the top of the office."

Keough's brows lifted in the seamed, bronzed face. "How can I help you?"

"By passing me on to the right person, sir. You see, I doubt if anybody in this country is more than, oh, ten steps away from the top. Usually fewer. Like, I know my father, who knows a state committeeman of the Popular Party, who must be buddy-buddy with our Senators, who've got the ear of the President. Like that."

Keough stroked his beard. "Then why not ask your father?"

"I may. But only for backup, an

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extra smidgin of influence. Politicians will tend to dismiss me as a crank, and they've learned how to slough off cranks—Darwinian necessity." Keough chuckled, which encouraged Skip to continue. Nonetheless he felt nervous enough that, hardly thinking about it, he took pad and pencil from his tunic and started sketching while he spoke. "They will listen to a reputable scientist or engineer. And that kind is likelier to listen to me. And you, sir, must know any number of such. Please help. It's urgent. Not for me. I don't care who delivers my message, if he delivers it straight. This is for the human race."

Keough's eyes veiled.

"I know," Skip said. "A beardless boy intends to save the world. Aren't cranks generally older? All I want to do is give the authorities an idea that doesn't seem to have hit them. If I wrote to Washington, you know I'd get a form letter thanking me for my interest in democracy. But if you tell somebody respected, who respects you, that you think I may be on to something, he'll listen. And so it'll go."

"What's that you're doodling?" Keough asked sharply.

"Huh? Oh . . . nothing. I guess what you're doing here suggested it." Skip passed the cartoon over. A few lines showed a steppe, in the background a burning town, in the foreground several mounted Mongols of Genghis Khan's time. They were looking in some dismay at a leader who, pointing furiously to a lone blade of grass, exclaimed, "Who's responsible for this?"

Skip didn't think the little jest rated such volcanic laughter. "Okay," Keough said. "You've earned yourself five minutes."

At the end of them, he said, "Go on."

After an hour, he sprang to his feet. "You could be flat wrong," he roared, "but what's to lose? And a galaxy to grab! Sure, I'll buck you on, lad. I'll arrange your transportation, too. If you are wrong, if you never do another deed in your life worth a belch, remember, you did give old Dan Keough an hour's hope for his grandchildren!"

IV

BEYOND THE ENERGY curtain was a short tubular passage set with odd projections that might be handgrips. Yvonne used them to pull herself along. The corridor, like the room to which it led, was lined with an unknown material, smooth, slightly yielding, in which colors swirled and eddied, a slow, intricate dance that could fascinate you close to hypnotism if you watched. The substance also provided adequate neutral illumination.

From the passage Yvonne entered a hemispherical chamber, about 30 meters in radius. It likewise was provided with grips, whereon successive human visitors had secured sleeping harness, cameras, portable analytical kits, and other such gear, until its original harmony was lost in clutter. A paraboloid bulged into it, leaving a maximum of four meters between sections.

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This seemed to be a verandah projecting from whatever rooms lay behind. It was transparent, seemingly unbroken. On occasion it had dilated, when the Sigman passed out small biological samples in glass containers through a one-way force screen. The being had declined the terrestrial specimens offered, by simply not admitting them, and had made no further presents since the early days.

The light within the dome was orange-yellow in hue and more intense than what falls on Earth. The atmosphere likewise differed from the kind provided in the "guest quarters." The Sigman had obliged with a bottleful. The composition turned out to be approximately like Earth's on a humid day, but twice as dense. Bolometers indicated a tropical temperature, variable but averaging 33 ° C. How these facts could be reconciled with the hypothesis that the planet of origin was smaller than man's, no one was sure and everyone wanted greatly to know.

It was likewise unclear why the dome was crowded, not only with a three-dimensional lattice of fixed objects (mostly adjustable, frequently moving or changing shape as if of themselves, none understandable to men albeit always pleasing to the eye) but with a hundred varieties, a thousand colors of plants (blue-green fronded leaves, exquisite when they weren't magnificent) which seemingly grew out of certain lattice members. To renew oxygen? But man already had more efficient methods for that. Some unheard-of symbiosis? A hobby, to relieve loneliness? An aspect of religion? Scientists had come to damn their beauty. It blocked them from seeing more than a few meters past the inner wall.

The Sigman rarely showed itself before its visitors had unsuited and stowed their baggage. Yvonne did this quickly. She had soon gotten the hang of operating in weightlessness. Bluestocking she might be, but she was in addition a good swimmer and ferocious tennis player.

The air was comfortably warm. It held a slight spicy odor. The utter stillness—ventilation without pumps was another trick humans would like to acquire—added to the surreal feeling of flight. Yvonne suppressed a desire to indulge in acrobatics as sternly as she suppressed the wish for a cigarette. A job was on hand. She checked the cameras and recording instruments, which had naturally been left going. Ample tape remained. Doubtless it held as little of interest as all its predecessors.

Blast it, the Sigman can't be busy every moment on those junkets around our system! This ship must be wholly self-running; ours almost are. I can imagine the creature taking off to make planetological studies or simply to break the monotony. I can even see that it might not care to have us around for more than limited periods of time. But why won't it go on camera and start establishing a language? Point to a drawing or photograph or whatever of something, make a noise or write a word. Lord knows our people tried. They'd point to a companion and say, "Man." They'd diagram the Solar System, the periodic table, the water

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molecule. We never got a response in kind.

I think the suggestion must be right, that the Sigman refuses our specimens because it already knows about them. Perhaps they are dangerous to it. (Though we, taking elaborate precautions, found nothing to fear. How could a life using dextro amino acids and levo sugars eat us, let alone infect us?) More plausible is the idea that this is not the first Sigman visit. A long development must lie behind a ship as perfected as this; and Sol is among their nearer stars. Probably they made their scientific studies 10,000 years ago. Or one thousand; we'd have no reliable record. Probably Earth's radio emission attracted them back and our visitor is a cultural anthropologist.

Then why doesn't it act like one?

And if, contrariwise, it has no interest in us, why does it admit us at all?

The thoughts, worn smooth by repetition, passed through Yvonne's head like a tune she couldn't shake loose. She must concentrate too hard on her chores. But when, at last, she had placed her cluster of apparatus on the dome with suction cups, and herself in an aluminum frame similarly fastened—then her new thoughts rushed forth, and she quivered with eagerness.

The Sigman came.

No amount of earnest effort could altogether prevent the sight from turning her slightly queasy. Many people, seeing it on television, were physically sickened. "We look as horrible to it as it does to us" had become a cliche, like "This ought to show us how tiny the differences between humans really are." Neither had made many converts.

A comedian had described the being as a cross between a slug and a pinecone. The phrase struck. About three meters long, 130 centimeters thick, the body was a flexible ellipsoid shingled in squarish golden-brown plates. Those were independently mounted, on muscular stalks at three different levels, so that seen from outside they overlapped. When the Sigman stretched itself, cameras occasionally recorded glimpses of the inner body thus protected, a spongy black mass.

Symmetry was preserved by four stumpy, shell-covered legs near the middle, with disc-shaped webbed feet, and by a pair of arms further out at either end. Hence the Sigman had no front or rear; it moved and worked as easily "backward" as "forward." Each arm possessed shoulder joint, elbow, and wrist, but there the resemblance to man's stopped. The hard brown material sheathed it like a crab's. Vaguely crustacean, too, were the four mandibles at the end, whose cutting and grinding surfaces worked against each other. The Sigman had been observed eating. The claws macerated what must be food, then held the mess against the spongy surface they surrounded. There, apparently, fierce digestive juices broke it down till it was absorbed straight up the arms.

The claws in turn were, set by set, surrounded by six ropy short tentacles. These made excellent fingers but, to a man, suggested a snakepit.

Retractable beneath the shingles or

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extensible between them, here and there over the whole body, were assorted thin tendrils. Presumably they were sensors but, aside from four unmistakable eyes, their functions remained unidentified.

The plates always glistened, not simply with moisture but with dripping slimes that were thought to be excreted matter.

Yvonne had her repugnance well under control. "Hello," she said. Her smile, she knew, was useless.

The shape hauled itself through the lattice until two of those stalked, unwinking black eyes stared into hers. Fog wraiths curled behind; water droplets formed on leaves, broke loose and danced among them like tiny stars.

The Sigman boomed. Somehow sound was passed through the dome. Phonograms were automatically made. Yvonne wondered how many thousand man-hours had been spent poring over them. She'd contributed plenty herself.

Before her was a console from which a wire ran back to the sonic synthesizer that had been installed. It could reproduce elements of Sigman speech, if speech was what those noises were, in any combination. To date it had gotten no response, had seemed rather to make the Sigman go away sooner.

Yvonne refreshed memory by a glance at her clipboarded notes, and struck the first of the phrases she had planned. It came forth as a chord, twanging bass through treble, simultaneous chirp and whistle.

Will it work? Her heartbeat shook her.

The Sigman's eyestalks rose rigid.

Yvonne played a second phrase. Claws spread wide. The creature was showing more reaction than to any previous attempt. Yvonne let the notes die away. She took from her clipboard the first of a series of photographs and drawings. It showed a nude man. She played the phrase again.

A slight variation in it accompanied the picture of a woman. A third variation was associated with a mixed group. The Sigman extended tendril after tendril. Was it getting the idea at last? Did it realize that she was suggesting words for "human-male," "human-female," "humans"?

The Sigman trilled and withdrew from sight. Yvonne waited, head awhirl. The Sigman returned quickly, carrying a small globular object. *The projector!* flashed through Yvonne. *O God, O God, it hasn't brought that out for more than two years!*

In the air appeared a three-dimensional multi-colored interweaving of shapes, curves, lines. It flowed through changes, complex and beautiful as running water. The Sigman meanwhile piped and growled, waved tendrils in a kind of ballet, and exuded a fine spray of yellow fluid.

Yvonne shook her head. Disappointment was like a belly blow. "I don't understand," she said, dry-mouthed.

The Sigman paused. Silence waxed. And then, retracting most of its tendrils, it operated to project a red band whose pointed end was directed at itself. It waited. She brought forth a chord. The Sigman repeated it. The band swung to indicate her. She sounded what she had given for "woman" and heard it given back.

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For a second, darkness passed through her. She came out of the near faint sobbing, but for glory. After three years, the stranger was ready to help create a common language.

Yvonne turned when her teammate's spacesuited form floated in. *Damn!* was her first reaction. In the flame of achievement, she had actually forgotten Wang Li was due to join her. Then she realized she was atremble with tension and the sweat that soaked her coverall gave off an unladylike smell.

Maybe the Sigman welcomed a break too. It stuck the optical projector between two bars which lifted from the deck in superb helices, and floated off into the flowers. Presently leaves began to wave and rustle; it had turned a blower on them, as it often did.

Yvonne paused not to wonder why. With jittering fingers she assembled her notes. She went to the sound recorder and tapped its keys, projecting onto the screen the successive phonograms of the words.

"Good day, Dr. Canter."

Her exasperation vanished. She couldn't help herself, even before this man she didn't like. He had unsuited and now hung close beside her, lightly holding a handgrip. Her arms went around him, almost knocking him loose. She cried into his ear: "I've done it! We've won! We have the key!"

"What?" His habitual impassivity broke to the extent of widened eyes and open mouth. "Are you certain?"

She released him. "Ten words, this past hour," she chattered. "We ran through them over and over, m-m-making sure there was no mistake. See, no, listen, I'll play back the tapes, you can look at my notes and the 'grams—here, pictures of several different men, color, clothes, build . . . the Sigman itself can't confuse them . . . and I got the same word each time, 'human-male'—" The clipboard slipped from her grasp and twirled out of reach.

Wang retrieved it. He stayed where he was, paging through the sheets, frowning in his concentration. *Maybe just as well he's such a cold fish,* Yvonne thought while she calmed down. *If he were somebody who can celebrate, I might . . . have done anything. And we do have a long, tough haul before us, calling for every brain cell we've got.*

She studied him. He was a North Chinese, hence taller than she though of slender build. Clean-shaven in the manner of his country, his face was strong in jaws and nose, beneath a high forehead and short gray hair. Free fall or no, he remained ramrod straight in the drab brown quasi-uniform common among officials of the People's Republic. For he was not simply a professor at Peking University. The government had backed his research into what was called "linguatherapy" more because the results might help in absorbing Tibetans, Mongols, and other minorities, than for their possible value in treating mental illness. (She did assume that he himself had had the latter purpose in mind.)

"Wonderful, if true," he said at length. His English was fluent, the accent slight. "No discourtesy, of course. But we have had false hopes in

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the past. The Sigman would apparently be cooperative, but after minutes it would go away for hours, and has invariably dismissed us within a few days."

"Exactly," Yvonne answered. "I've had a full hour. And for the first time, as I said, the results are reproducible. It will adopt any word I give it in association with something, and repeat that word next time the something is indicated. Always before, it seemed to be trying to teach us a word of its own, but disappeared very shortly when we played those phonemes back. And our attempts at setting up vocal or visual codes had still more dismal endings. I tell you, now—Wait! It's returning! You'll see for yourself."

The Sigman carried an iridescent ovoid, which it attached to a bar near the dome wall. "I have seen that thing," Wang said, "albeit not for some while. I believe it is a recording device."

"Sure. It'd about given up on trying to communicate with us. But now that we can build a mutual language, naturally it'll have to take notes."

Yvonne and the Sigman got back to work. Wang Li floated motionless, watching. The cameras filmed nothing dramatic—exchange of sounds, woman holding up pictures, nonhuman projecting recognizable copies (as a David painting might recognizably have suggested one by van Gogh)—what was happening was too big for drama.

At the end of two more hours, the Sigman had evidently had enough for a while and retired. Yvonne didn't mind. She felt wrung out. Entering the sanitary cubicle, she undressed, sponged herself clean, and donned a fresh coverall. Emerging, she found that Wang had opened the rations and started them heating at the glower. He already had a squeeze bottle of coffee for her.

"Thanks." It warmed and relaxed her. She strapped her body loosely into place and stretched out.

"A pity we have no champagne," he said, faintly smiling.

"Oh, I seldom drink. I would like a smoke—tobacco, I mean, not marijuana."

"We are similar in that respect." Wang's look was very steady on her. "Would you like to explain your accomplishment? It really does seem as if you have succeeded, and I offer congratulations both heartfelt and humble."

Down underneath, he's human. Maybe that thought joined with triumph and with the need to uncoil, to make her feel friendlier toward him than would otherwise have been the case. And they were, after all, alone in this strange, quiet room.

"Certainly." She sipped. "Only . . . well, I'm tired, my mind's in disarray. May I keep things on a kindergarten level and tell you stuff you know as well as you know your name?"

"That might actually be best. It will give perspective and point out what, in a welter of data, is significant. Your eventual full report may not be easy reading for me."

The words rushed from her as if she were intoxicated:

"Perhaps not. You recall my research

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before this project was in mathematical semantics, though my Ph.D. was in comparative linguistics. I used a lot of math.

"What was the situation? The Sigman can't produce human-type sounds; its appear to come from a set of vibrating tympani. We can't produce Sigman vocables. That is, we can with the synthesizer, but it's almost impossibly difficult. Ten fingers, moving through electromagnetic fields, are supposed to generate a high-fidelity version of a language that uses hundreds of frequencies and amplitudes simultaneously?

"Not having a corresponding instrument—and I think, now, I know why not—the Sigman attempted at first to teach men its tongue. Those sounds, those incomprehensible however lovely drawings and whatnot it exhibited . . . we didn't get the idea. I mean, none of the research teams did; I wasn't here at the start, of course. We tried showing objects and pictures ourselves. The Sigman would make a noise. We'd take a phonogram of that noise, feed this into the synthesizer, and try haltingly to combine elements to get higher abstractions. 'Man' and 'Sigman' together equals 'intelligent beings'—that sort of thing. The Sigman quickly retreated to its inner suite.

"We guessed its language might be so . hopelessly alien that our combinations were nonsensical. In fact, I've always felt Fuentes' idea is right. The Sigman language is only vocal in part. Position, gesture, perhaps odors emitted at will, may be more important. Therefore communication may be extremely subtle and complex. It may be non-linear, it may involve many concepts at once that we humans put separately, it may deal with whole aspects of reality where we have to take a piece at a time. The cellular study of those biological samples hints at something like this.

"Well, if we couldn't learn Sigman, might the opposite approach work? We tried to build an artificial language from the ground up, one that it could pronounce and we could synthesize and both races could comprehend. The attempt got results just as bad, or worse. Do you realize that in three years men have been aboard this vessel a total of 98 days?"

"I keep track," Wang said. "Ah, I believe dinner is ready."

Yvonne sighed. "I did have a reason for that lecture. Your suggestion that I emphasize the points which spurred my thinking. Or did I need to? Maybe I'm high on happiness."

"Please say whatever you desire." Wang handed her her rack. To simplify work, meals were standardized. "Tonight" they both had fish filet, fried rice and onions (in squeeze bags), bok choy (in covered disposable dishes), and cookies. They scarcely noticed.

"The real job I did can't be put in words," Yvonne said. "It involved every kind of statistical analysis of data that I could think of. If I didn't have a priority on computer time, I'd still be at it.

"Oh, yes, others have done the same. But none of those people demonstrated that any patterns they

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found were significant. Remember, given finite sets of numbers, you can construct a literal infinity of functions relating them. I applied some results from my earlier work in human linguistics, especially a theorem I'm quite proud of. That let me make quantitative predictions of the consequences of certain hypotheses which occurred to me."

She stopped to chew. Wang ate on, imperturbably.

"Well, I'll give you the results," Yvonne said. "First, I can show that we've been going too fast. The frequencies with which identifiable combinations recur in the Sigman's utterances average out at half the median of human languages. Maybe it actually thinks more slowly, if more deeply, than we do. But if I'm wrong about this, our comparative machine-gun chatter must at any rate be confusing and annoying. The confusion it could overcome—the annoyance, not. In fact, I suspect we've been inflicting outright pain."

Wang's hand paused halfway to his mouth.

Yvonne nodded. "Your people hear English as harsh and staccato, mine hear Chinese as high-pitched and singsong," she said. "Not too pleasant till one gets used to it. Our musics are a still more clear-cut example. Actually, I enjoy some Chinese music, as you perhaps enjoy my beloved Beethoven, but to many of my countrymen a concert would be excruciating. We needn't go outside of a single society, though. I find today's popular American music merely banal. But I've heard recordings from, oh, 50 years

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back. Having to sit through an evening of that stuff would be, to me, literal torture.

"I came to believe the Sigman simply can't endure our clumsy attempts to make its kind of sounds.

"And that, I think, is why it didn't bring a synthesizer. Continuous human speech would have been unbearable. Attempts at communication by visual symbols broke down for similar reasons. Our drawings, our alphabet are too ugly, perhaps too angular. Maybe we should have tried Chinese characters."

Wang frowned while he consumed the interrupted morsel. "Would so shrinkingly sensitive a soul cross interstellar space?" he asked finally.

"We don't know its psychology. Suppose it, trying to speak to us, kept making noises like a fingernail scraping on a blackboard—or else those subsonic notes that induce fear reactions. Many humans couldn't have stood that.

"I admit you have a good point, Professor Wang, so good that no one before me thought it might be invalid. Oh, the question may not turn on actual pain. The trouble may, as I said before, just be annoyance. The Sigman may keep going off in a huff because we keep making such awful cacophonies.

"So I went back to the tapes and phonograms and analyzed them for musical rules."

"Intonation?" Wang asked at once.

Yvonne laughed. "I'm not sure. Principally what I found were relationships like those governing our scales and keys. Furthermore, there are relationships between tonal qualities—some occur together, some don't—and the interludes between them. It's extraordinarily complicated. I doubt if I've extracted more than a fraction yet.

"But I could see what we'd done wrong. We can record a phrase and play it back with high fidelity. However, Sigman grammar doesn't operate by tacking phrases together, any more than a heavily inflected language like Latin does. Besides, the method is hopelessly slow and awkward. Later we tried creating an artificial speech, with the synthesizer making Sigman-type vocables. Only we got every relationship wrong. The effect was as bad—as irritating or outright painful—as that of a tone-deaf person trying to sing. Or worse, probably.

"What I did, therefore, was start fresh. The computer helped me devise a spoken language which obeys the basic harmony rules but which is not too complicated to produce on the synthesizer. And it can't be hopelessly amiss . . . because the Sigman *is* working on learning it!"

Wang sat quiet a long while before he nodded. "Wonderful indeed." His smile didn't seem to go further than the teeth. Well, no doubt he felt a degree of jealousy, on his country's behalf if not his own.

"Oh, I anticipate," Yvonne confessed. "This is very new. What I have, thus far, is about a hundred nouns, verbs, and adjectives that can be defined ostensively. I've roughed out a pidgin grammar, the simplest and least ambiguous I could invent on short

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notice. It's positional, like English or Chinese. So far the only inflections are to show plurals. I think we'll want them for tenses too, but maybe not. Maybe the Sigmans have a time-concept like the Hopi. We'll have to feel our way. But we'll get there!"

The existing vocabulary was soon conveyed, and a few trial sentences constructed. That went less well. Perhaps Sigmans didn't make anything strictly corresponding to sentences. However, toward the end the nonhuman was projecting its eldritch sketches in animation and suiting words to the actions depicted. "Man walks. Men walk. Sigman walks. Men and Sigmans walk. Planet rotates. Planet revolves. Blue planet revolves. Green planet revolves. Blue and green planets rotate and revolve."

Wang watched, studied her notes, made occasional suggestions, generally kept in the background.

On the third day the Sigman dismissed the Earthlings. The indication was a warbling note. After the first two times, when a gradual but inexorable drop in air pressure followed, men had gotten the message.

"I'm not sorry, to be honest," Yvonne said. "I suspect it wants to rest and ponder. And I could use a rest myself."

"You deserve one," Wang replied tonelessly.

Their respective spacecraft removed them in response to a red flicker-signal. Yvonne took the records—films, tapes, plates, rolls, from a score of scientific instruments—because it was an American's turn to do so. The rule impressed her as ridiculous, when they were promptly scanned for the public data banks; but it hung on.

Or is "ridiculous" the proper word? crossed momentarily through her joy. *The arrangement means nothing per se. However, as a symbol of anachronisms that are deadly dangerous in an era when men can blow up the world—I wonder.*

V

BEHIND THE DESK, which seemed wide and glassy to Wang Li as a fusion bomb crater, General Chou Yuan reared upright in his chair. "You did not even demand immediate transmission of her computations?" he exclaimed.

Wang bent his head. "No, Comrade General," he said miserably. "It . . . did not occur to me. She promised to send the material soon. But it is in her apartment, where she has her study, and . . . no doubt her superiors will keep her on base for a while . . . and journalists, considering what a sensation the news must be—"

"It is that." Chou's tone was grim. His broad face seldom showed much expression, but he was scowling now, and he drummed on the desktop. For Wang, those uniformed shoulders blocked out most of the window behind. Blue summer air of Earth, glimpse of utterly green trees and a soaring arc of temple roof on Prospect Hill, stood infinitely remote. A breeze wandering in had somehow lost freshness, carried nothing save the

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endless murmur of Peking's traffic.

Despite noise, the office held a stretched silence. And it was bare; except for the tenant—no, with the tenant—how bare and barren! On the right wall hung a portrait of Lenin, on the left one of Mao. Wang felt that their eyes, and the eyes of Chairman Sung's picture at his back, drilled into him.

What am I afraid of? I am a patriot, they know that, they trust me . . . Public humiliation? No, I must not think of confession and correction before my friends as "humiliation." Have I been too much in the West? Perhaps the Western virus has entered my blood and needs cleaning out—It came to Wang why he trembled. They might take him off the Sigman project, just when it was unfolding like a blossom in springtime.

"Catastrophic, this news babbled over the radio on Canter's way down," Chou said. "Could you not have advised discretion until the possibilities for good or ill have been considered?"

"I never dreamed it could be anything but occasion for delight, Comrade General." Inspiration: "Chairman Sung has repeatedly instructed us that an advanced society like our visitor's can only be anti-imperialistic and can only have correct thoughts to offer."

"Yes. Yes." Chou sat still for a moment. "Well, when do you expect to receive Canter's material?"

"Not for days at best, I fear. She told me it was disorganized, considerable of it in her private abbreviations, and she would write a formal report."

"More delay! And if and when the Americans let her transmit to us, publish to the world—will they allow a full and truthful account?"

"Why should they not?" Wang asked, startled half out of his worry.

"Comrade Professor, you have been abroad more than most, have correspondents in foreign countries, have free access to foreign publications and programs." Chou barked the remainder: "You should not be naive. That spaceship is totally invulnerable to any weapon we know; it is immensely faster, completely maneuverable, altogether self-contained and self-supplying; by its photon drive, if nothing else, it can lay waste whatever areas the pilot chooses, with scalpel precision. Who controls those powers is master of the world. Do you imagine this has not occurred to the imperialist governments?"

"But, but the Sigman—"

Chou regarded Wang silently for another while. And then, greatest surprise yet, he leaned back, smiled, took out a cigarette and struck it. Smoke streamed forth to accompany words gone mild:

"You have given insufficient thought to the ramifications, Comrade Professor. However, I daresay a pure researcher like you cannot really be blamed. Your work has been valuable. Now perhaps you can render a supreme service, so that men a thousand years from today will bow to your name."

Wang unclenched his fists. He felt abruptly weak. "I listen, Comrade General," he whispered.

"Chairman Sung and his advisors have analyzed the political

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implications of the Sigman's arrival. These are manifold. Before we can decide what to do, we need answers to any number of crucial questions. You, our most able and experienced investigator of the problem, are our present best hope for that."

Chou drew breath before he went on: "Some believe the Sigman will inevitably put itself at the disposal of the people's sacred cause, when communication has become good enough for it to realize what conditions are like on Earth. This is possible, of course, and pleasant to believe. But if theory stops at that point, the theorist reveals ignorance and laziness." Chou tautened again. Renewed cold fury lashed, this time beyond the office, around the world. "Can any educated person suppose the imperialists and revisionists have not considered the idea too? Have they no preparations against that contingency? Will they meekly surrender their profits and powers? You know better!"

"I, I do. How well I do," Wang stammered.

The image of his father limped across memory, wounded by the Americans as a youth in Korea, slain by the Russians as an army officer in Siberia. And the Soviet aircraft afterward, terrible snarling whistle when they slanted through the heaven of a little boy who wept for his father and screamed for terror . . . *I nourished my hopes. I thought the slow opening of gates, the Tokyo Accord, the arms control agreements, the famine relief effort—such things seemed to me the harbingers of a better day, when China will no longer be ringed in by demons. And they may have been; they may have been; I do not doubt that the vast majority of people everywhere are honest and of good will.*

Yet Chou speaks rightly. Too sudden a dawn may alarm the demons of night to the point of madness.

Wang wet his lips. "We must proceed with utmost care, yes, I understand," he said.

"There are other possibilities," Chou told him. "Conceivably the Americans, for example, may find ways to lie to the Sigman, delude it into striking a mortal blow for them. Or, more likely, it will answer any technical questions put, never dreaming they are imperialists who ask. As Chairman Sung has declared, we cannot blindly assume that history on so different a planet followed an identical course with ours. For all we know, Sigmans have always been pure and peaceful Communists, or they may long since have transcended Communism itself."

"I will follow every word of every discussion in the ship," Wang promised. "Should we demand a general moratorium on requests for engineering data?"

"That will be decided." Chou jabbed his cigarette forward like a bayonet. "It is even conceivable that the Sigman has evil intentions, or can be persuaded to evil actions. Wait! The laws of Marx, Lenin, and Mao must be applied imaginatively, not dogmatically. Suppose the Sigman's race did not build that vessel. Suppose the creature is a kind of pirate who stole the craft, after the trusting owners

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had provided instruction in its use. Have you never felt just a trifle suspicious of one who makes years-long voyages alone?"

"If it is alone."

"If not, why have its companions never revealed themselves?"

"Who can gauge the motives of a mind absolutely nonhuman?" Wang frowned. "I must admit, I have in fact often said, I am puzzled by its solitary traveling. Intelligence, sentience, by any reasonable definition we can make, must involve communication in the most fundamental way, might indeed well be said to *be* communication. For what is thought except the creation and manipulation of symbols? A primitive species with no instinctive drive toward communication—a drive actually stronger than sex, often stronger than self-preservation, as in a Communist who undergoes martyrdom to help spread the truth—a race without that kind of urge would, presumably, not evolve a human-level brain. It would remain merely animal. Therefore the Sigman ought to want companionship, conversation, moral support, like you or me. I doubt we could stay sane, Comrade General, if we had to endure so prolonged a loneliness."

"This is no time for lectures," Chou said. "You are directed for the nonce, first, to understand that your country may be in mortal danger; second, to lend your fullest efforts toward speedy guarding against any dangers—and, naturally, speedy realizing of the bright opportunities we hope will prove to be the reality of this situation."

Wang lifted his hand. "For the people!" The traditional pledge came forth briskly, but failed to stir his spirit. He wondered why, and decided that the stark response he had gotten to his jubilant tidings had downcast him.

"Push forward with your whole energy toward mastering the language," Chou said. "If we can stay abreast of the Americans in that respect—if, better, we can surpass them—they will not be able to hoodwink us or the Sigman."

"But the language is artificial," Wang objected, "and thus far is rudimentary."

"Then you must take a leading role in its further development."

"M-m-m . . . yes. As it grows, I suspect, in due modesty, I will become the most proficient in its actual use. Dr. Canter is brilliant, but her genius lies in theory; she lacks my practical experience with a variety of tongues. Serov, Duclos, and—"

"Indeed, indeed." Chou registered ardor. "At last you may become able to talk with the Sigman privately—if, for instance, no one else can follow the conversation—and explain the facts." He checked himself. "Let such decisions wait their proper time. The immediate requirement is to get full information. Can you phone Canter and ask her to send her material at once, no matter how chaotic it looks?"

"I can try," Wang said doubtfully. "Her superiors may already have forbidden it. Or, if not, she is . . . a very vulnerable person, I think, hiding in a brittle shell. She may not wish to show anyone else something of hers that is scrawled and disorderly." He paused. "Besides, might a call not

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seem over-eager?"

Chou dragged on his cigarette. Reluctant, he agreed, "It might," and smashed the stub into a crowded ashtray.

"Frankly, Comrade General," Wang continued with more vigor—for reminded of the magnificent scientific romp ahead of him, he could forget about man's vicious lunacies—"I do not believe it matters. She gave me the essential information. My own notes are copious; and my office has received printouts of the latest recordings, as per agreement. Dr. Canter spoke freely to me, often unnecessarily fulsomely. We lack nothing except her precise mathematical analysis and the exact rules discovered by it.

"Do you not see, the insight itself is what counts? Now that we know what to look for, I feel sure we can duplicate her results in two or three weeks. Any competent analyst who has access to computers—"

"Excellent!" Chou actually beamed. "You are in charge. Work space will be cleared for you in this very building. Sleeping quarters will adjoin it. Commandeer anything and anyone you please."

"What?" Wang blinked. "I can operate from my home. Or, if a large staff is required, my University department—"

"Comrade Wang," Chou said, happily more than severely, "I realize you are anxious to see your wife and children, but I fear the needs of the people come first. Security measures are essential; you know why. As you have probably guessed, this interview was ordered on the highest level of government."

"Your wife will be informed that you are detained on business." Chou paused. "If you, ah, find that biological urges distract you from your studies—"

"No, no," Wang said. There passed through him:

Not what he's thinking of, especially. In fact, let us be honest, here alone among ourselves, we several souls (for I do believe that many primitive tribes, and as subtle and powerful a folk as the ancient Egyptians, spoke a profound truth when they said that man has more than one soul)—my Yao, who was moonlight and mountain peaks, has become a dour fanatic whom I stay with largely because her impeccable respectability guarantees me permission to travel, correspond, read, listen, savor this entire marvelous world. (Until we have a system which grants the same freedom to all men, security tragically requires that only a few can enjoy it.)

Oh, I have further reasons. Men always do. I sense that down underneath the shrill voice and the tight lips, she too remembers; she too wonders, hurt and bewildered, what happened.

And do you recall, O souls, that conference in England (calligraphic austerity of Oxford's spires against iron-gray clouds a-race on an enormous wet wind), and the book with which I read myself to sleep one night, what was the author's name, yes, Chesterton, cranky, wrong-headed, already archaic a hundred years ago . . . nevertheless he defined asceticism as the appetite for that

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which one does not like—? We have an element of asceticism in us, do we not, my souls?

He had been looking forward to his home simply as a place. He rated (the Americans would say) a house and garden well outside this city, built for a mandarin in Manchu days. The curve of branches across a full moon; the grand sweep of roof, paradoxical in the mellowness of old red tiles; shadows of breeze-blown flowers on a wall where hung a scroll of willows, bridge, mountain captured in a few swift lines 800 years ago by Ma Yuan himself; the books, yes, old Li Po, the poet who was more drunk on life, really, than on the wine he sang of—

Before everything else Wang missed his children. P'ing. Tai and Chen were good boys, one took pride in Tai's excellent marks at school and his earnestness among the Pioneers, one felt sure Chen would outgrow the hobbledehoy's loudness. But small, small P'ing (which sounds not unlike the word for crabapple that blooms red and white across the quickening earth, but which really means peace) came running and laughing to meet him, holding out her arms, squealing delight when he tossed her in the air; she walked hand in hand with him through the garden and called him a great big bag of love.

Well, a week, two or three maybe. No more. To help make sure that incandescent horror will never bloom above P'ing, that her melted eyeballs will never run down her cooked chubby face, that she will, rather, inherit the stars.

Wang grew aware that Chou was regarding him in puzzlement. A whole minute had gone by. He laughed, hearing it himself as shrill and uneven. "I beg your pardon, Comrade General. I was thinking and forgot—Yes, I will get busy at once."

"Good," Chou said. "We are fortunate to have you on our side. Tell me, do the Americans have anyone else to compare with this Canter?"

Surprised, Wang searched his mind. "Difficult to judge. They have extremely competent men. Levinsohn, Hillman, Wonsberg . . . Still, talents, capabilities vary. For example, Hillman has a weak heart; they cannot send him to space. I daresay, in view of what she has accomplished, Dr. Canter will remain their principal agent. Why do you ask?"

"However well-meaning herself," Chou said, "she reports to imperialists. We spoke of explaining the truth to the Sigman. Do you think the chance of doing this, uninterrupted, would be better in Canter's absence?"

"Why . . . perhaps . . . likewise hard to tell." Wang felt a twisting in him. She had talked so gladly. "It might be worthwhile trying to get her removed from the project. Suppose I—No, if I said, at this precise juncture, she was personally obnoxious to me, I would not be believed . . . M-m-m . . . If we could prevail on someone else, a representative of some third country, to have a quarrel with her and— This is not my province, Comrade General."

"I realize that. I only wanted your opinion as to the desirability of easing her out."

The conversation went on a while

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longer, until Chou rang for a flunky to guide Wang to his new quarters. Alone, the General called an extremely important man and reported. Having received his orders, he next punched a button on the phone which activated a satellite relay to America. Scrambled after enciphering, the beam would if intercepted be taken for a burst of ordinary radio noise. That particular facility was as secret and rarely used as anything owned by the People's Republic.

The man who styled himself Sam Jones leaned across the table. "You know how a lot of us feel," he said. "We can't trust the Sigman monster. How can we dare? Next to it, the Chinks are like our brothers. Christ, it drips shit out of its whole body!"

"Yeh, I've kind of wondered myself," Nick Waller rumbled.

"And now this Canter woman. On the screen, in the papers, everywhere, you must have heard. She's found a way to talk to it."

"I heard."

The room was surrounded by night. Though the hour was late, a vibration went through, the huge noise of megalopolis. An overhead fluoro pocketed Jones' gaunt face with shadow. He shifted the briefcase on his lap.

"This has got to be stopped," he said. "You can see that. If we don't try to talk to the thing, maybe it'll give up on us. Whatever plans it has, it must need a way of talking first. Right? Otherwise it could simply flame our planet. It needs human dupes and tools."

Waller drew on his cigar and let the smoke out slowly, veiling his eyes. "Maybe," he said. "What you getting at?"

"I don't say the project will come to a halt without Mrs. Canter," Jones told him, "but it'd be handicapped, and we've got to start somewhere."

Waller stirred. "Who are you, anyway? All I know is, Luigi said I'd be interested to talk with you. How do you connect to him?"

"Never mind how," Jones said. "Don't be afraid of Luigi. Everybody has a hundred different connections. I could have traced you, gotten this appointment, through, oh, your mother if need be. She'd know a serving maid, who'd also work for a banker, who'd be a friend of a cousin of mine. You see?"

Waller grunted.

"What I'm after is professional help," Jones said. "I have a lot of information, but not much in the way of workers. The FBI—Never mind. I have a job for you which should be easy, if you want it, and the kind of money in this briefcase—more to come on completion of assignment—that I hope will make you want it."

Waller settled back to listen. He was not perturbed and scarcely curious. He'd need to make sure this Jones, whatever the real name might be, was not a police agent; but that wasn't hard. Nor should it be hard to cover tracks so well that, if Jones blatted afterward, the heavies wouldn't be able to prove anything about Nick Waller's company.

Okay, Jones was off orbit. What matter, if he had the jingle to pay for

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his whims? As many skewbrains as there were around these days, probably a few were bound to be rich.

Of course, Waller wouldn't commit before checking with his astrologer. But the horoscope would have to be pretty bad to deter him, who carried an amulet made especially for him by the local One.

"Go ahead," he invited. "Mind you, I doubt if I can help you myself. But maybe I can give you a name or two."

Standard operating procedure. The revolutionaries hadn't brought down the Ortho—it simply wore them out, in a generation of running guerrilla warfare—but they had brought a good many ideas, like new weapons and protective gimmicks and organization by cells, to the attention of the Underworld. Nick Waller had been a high school rebel himself.

VI

YVONNE did not think she was timid: merely reserved, merely fond of her privacy and enjoying best those social occasions where a few good friends met for good food and conversation. She had expected to savor her triumph. And the congratulations, from personnel at Armstrong Base, by visiphone from Dad and Mother and the whole family, from the President and her colleagues around the globe, certainly they warmed her to the marrow. Yet they didn't quite make up for the stresses—the debriefings, the talks with assorted officials, the professional discussions, the cataract of requests for interviews, articles, lectures, support of worthy causes—finally the teleconference, when a dozen journalistic faces in their different screens threw a blizzard of questions at her weary head, many of them personal, and it was estimated that 100 million persons watched in the United States alone—

"Oh, please," she begged on the evening of her fifth day. "Let me go home."

Colonel Almeida nodded. "You shall, Yvonne. You look like death. I've been working to stall everybody else, clear your sked, so you can take a vacation. Get your duffel from your room and I'll flit you to Denver myself."

"My car's here."

"Leave it, unless you want to be mobbed by admirers, autograph hounds, newsmen, pitchmen, and whacks. Your conurb has practically been under siege, didn't you know? Better let me fly you. I'll have a man bring the car around tomorrow." Almeida drew a slip of paper from his tunic. "Here. Almost forgot. Your unlisted phone number. I took the liberty of arranging for it."

"You're sweet, Andy," she mumbled through the haze of exhaustion.

His Roman-nosed features broke into a grin. "No, just reasonably competent. I don't want you suffering the fate of the early astronauts and spending the rest of your career on the creamed chicken circuit. We need you too badly."

He didn't press conversation on her in the helicopter. The ride was balm. Only a murmur of blades and wind, the

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gentlest quiver through seat and flesh, broke stillness. They flew high; stars surrounded the canopy, myraids aglitter in an almost space-clear dark, Deneb of the Swan, Vega of the Lyre, Pegasus, the Great Bear, and Draco, Draco curving its regal arc halfway around Polaris. The land beneath lay wide and mysterious. Now and again a constellation glittered upon it, some town where perhaps a few humans also looked upward and wondered.

When Denver's sky-glow had appeared, Yvonne felt sufficiently rested for talk. She reached after a cigarette, withdrew her hand—too much smoking, hour upon hectic hour; her mouth felt scorched and she might be wise to get an anticancer booster shot—and said, "Andy?"

"Yes?" His profile, vaguely seen against the Milky Way, did not turn.

"Why do you claim I'm needed? I'm not that important. Lots of people can carry on, equally well or better."

"Don't you want to?" His tone stayed level.

"Oh, yes, yes. But . . . all right, I made a breakthrough, but somebody else would have done the same eventually, and I doubt if the next big discovery will be mine."

"Think there'll be any? I mean, from here on in, isn't it a matter of developing language till we can inquire directly about things?"

Yvonne shook her head. The hair swirled over her shoulders and brushed her cheeks. "I suspect we're lacking another critical piece of the puzzle. Why hasn't the Sigman signalled us yet for a new delegation?"

"It never has, this soon after its last callers left."

"The situation ought to be different now. Given the expectation, finally, of real intercourse—" Yvonne heard Almeida chuckle, and felt herself flush— "Well, wouldn't you or I carry on at maximum rate? No, I think the Sigman is waiting for something more. Until we have that to offer, it'll only spend odd moments on us, times when it isn't busy doing whatever else it came here for."

"You may be right," the colonel said. "You were earlier."

He paused, then went on gravely: "I didn't mean to raise the subject tonight, you being played out. But you seem a bit more chipper, and my superiors and I do want to start you thinking about it." Another pause. "Understand, nobody's mad at you. However, frankly, Yvonne, we wish to hell you hadn't reported your success on the way back, when the whole world could listen. And if that damned Chinaman hadn't been along—Given secrecy, though, we could have worked behind the scenes to influence his masters. You've no idea, I suppose, how wretchedly hard it is, reaching political or military agreements in a glare of publicity."

Surprise jerked her upright. "What? Andy, you're not serious!"

"I never was more serious. Look, Yvonne, you're a liberal intellectual, which means you're a reasonable and basically gentle person. So you assume everybody else is too. If only you'd apply to the rest of life the same rigorous thought and search for fact you do in your science!

"Consider. What the Sigman

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knows—or simply possession of its vessel—could give the overlordship of humanity to whoever got the exclusive franchise. Or if several factions acquired those powers, we'd be back in the missile era—worse off, probably, because I don't imagine we could cope with the problems raised by nonhuman technology, bursting on us overnight, as readily as for something we developed ourselves."

Yvonne decided to smoke after all. "Andy," she said, "I hadn't imagined you were stuck in . . . in a cold war attitude obsolete before you were born. Why, I've traveled from end to end of the Soviet Union myself and seen what they're like. Thousands visit China every year. And the arms control treaties, the . . . well, you must have read, seen on TV, been told, how the Soviets are undergoing the same kind of internal differentiation we are, the entire West and Japan are . . . and the Chinese are beginning to—Andy, since before the Sigman came, for six or seven decades in fact, every major power has tried to avoid armed conflict. And when fighting did happen, no major power has tried for total victory. They haven't been that insane. And nowhere on Earth, these past ten years or more, has there been any conflict worth calling a war. Do you honestly mean that persons high in the United States government are still afraid of . . . bogeymen?"

She sat back and inhaled deeply.

"Occasional bogeymen are real, my friend," Almeida answered. "Please listen. Please believe I intend no insult, I like and respect you, when I say you're stuck in an attitude which is worse than obsolete; it never had any relationship to reality. Sure, the Chinese are loosening up a bit, like the Soviets before them. In either case, the original religious fervor tended to die out with the original revolutionaries. Besides, experience showed that domestic terrorism isn't needed to further imperial ambitions, is actually counterproductive. Likewise, the nukes finally convinced the most foam-at-the-mouth fanatic that he couldn't possibly win in a rocket swap.

"None of this proves that the present leaders of our old rivals have renounced the old ambitions. Think of—oh, an example that doesn't look too partisan—England. The English had their Cromwellian period and outgrew it. Spreading the Gospel became simply one motive among many that sent their people forth. Nevertheless, they overran a large part of the world and wiped out a large number of non-English cultures."

"Today we have the Yellow Peril," Yvonne said sarcastically.

"Japan's also a Mongoloid country, and strong," Almeida responded. "Indonesia is getting there. I suppose we can leave the Africans out—though not for more than another generation is my guess—but sure, we face a White Peril too, not entirely Russian. West Europeans, Latin Americans . . . and, yes, Yankees. The Chinese, for instance, see us as posing a threat to them. They see themselves as the last wall between man and an insatiable American empire. Or have you never listened to a speech by Chairman Sung?"

"Rhetoric," Yvonne said in a fainter

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voice.

"Well—" Almeida drew breath. "Let me preach a bit, will you? Okay, you've been in the USSR, you've been to Europe and Mexico and wherever, no doubt you'll reach China eventually. May I point out, again with no putdown intended, you're not an intelligence agent, nor a sigaroon for that matter, you're a lady who travels first class? Of course you see only the pretty sights and meet only the charming people! I'm sure likewise that Wang Li admires you and has no fear of you. But does he trust President Braverman? Or General Nygard? Or lower-downs like me? I know damn well he does not. We've researched him. He's a Party member, probably not a fanatic but married to one; he's a captain in their military reserve; he's a Chinese patriot, steeped in Chinese culture, which was always xenophobic.

"Relax. My preaching won't include a sermon about how I believe Western civilization and the American state are worth preserving, how they hold out the best long-range hope for mankind. Just grant me that a lot of men and women share my antiquated prejudice. And a lot of others share Wang's, and so on for every power bloc on Earth. The balance that keeps the peace is more fragile than I like to think about. The old fears and hatreds aren't dead. They're not even in a particularly deep sleep.

"The chance that *somebody* may get an instant ability to conquer the rest—don't you see how that forces *everybody* to grab for a monopoly if it can be gotten, for parity at a minimum—how the very scramble could touch off the arms race and the explosion? Besides a country, Yvonne, I've got a wife and kids. They won't go down the furnace if I can help it."

She stared before her. Denver's exurbs scrawled multicolored ideograms on a land now scarred and paved over. The central sky-glow mounted high, bright, and restless, like that cast by a city in flames.

"What do you want?" she said at last.

Almeida's words remained calm. "Well, if I had my druthers, America would acquire the monopoly. I think we can better be trusted than anyone else—maybe because I feel more at home among Americans. Failing that, we'll try to dicker out another arrangement we can live with. Doubtless at first we'll play by ear.

"The point is, Yvonne, from here on in, whoever we send aloft will have to work on our behalf, observe security, follow orders, give unconditional priority to the best interests of the United States." He hesitated. "They needn't be opposed to the best interests of humanity at large. From your viewpoint, Yvonne, better you on our team than some chauvinist. Right? From my viewpoint, I want the top talent available, and at the present stage, that's you. Think it over."

He became busy obtaining his route assignment from the aerial branch of Traffic Control. Yvonne sat silent. The lights of central Denver glared, blinked, crawled, swooped, leaped, drowned the last stars. Eisenhower Conurb loomed ahead, a mesa studded with torches. Almeida set down on the landing deck, sprang out, and helped

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her descend. At this level, the sounds from below were a muted rumble. A cold wind streaked by, ruffling hair and slacks, sheathing her face.

Almeida waved to the guards. Recognizing Yvonne, they didn't inspect her pass or check with whoever might have invited her. Almeida clasped her hand. Half shadowed, his smile was wry. "I didn't want to perturb you," he said. "Take your time recuperating. Call me if you need anything, day or night, office or home."

"I will," she said. "Thanks, Andy."

He climbed back into his machine. She walked toward the entrance. A guard approached, touching his cap. "Good evening, Dr. Canter," he said shyly. "Welcome back."

"Oh, hello, Sergeant Bascomb. How have you been?"

"Fine, ma'm, fine. Don't you worry. Seemed like a million people was trying to see you in your place, but we got them curbed and not a man among us that isn't bound to watch over your safety and privacy."

"You're very kind." Yvonne shivered in the breeze.

"Uh . . . I wonder . . . I got this kid, twelve years old, really wild about space. He thinks the world of you, after what you did. Would you maybe—?" The guard extended a notepad.

Yvonne smiled on the left side of her mouth. "Certainly."

The guard added a pen. "His name's Ernest. Ernest Bascomb."

When she was inside, Yvonne gusted a sigh. She felt, again, too tired for worrying over Almeida's statements, for anything except, *Now I can be alone!*

No need to leave the conurb; it was a complete community. No need, even, to be stared at in its restaurants, shops, theaters, churches, schools, recreation sections. Whatever she wanted physically could be ordered and sent by the delivery shaft, whatever her spirit wanted could be projected on a screen or duplicated on the ReaderFax or—*In two, three days I'll throw a party. A quiet little dinner, quiet talking, maybe*—she must chuckle—*maybe, in reward, a game of Scrabble.* Her friends had long refused to play with her, on the not unreasonable ground that they always lost.

An elevator, a slideway, another elevator, a corridor, her door. Under the system employed here, the chief of guards had its single magnetic key. Yvonne laid palm on scanner plate. The door verified that she was among those for whom it should open (in fact, she was alone in that class) and obeyed.

When it had slid shut again, she sent her clothes, including what she wore, down the cleaner chute, unpacked the rest of her suitcase, and stowed it. *Compulsive neatness,* she thought. *What I really wanted to do was drop the things on the floor.*

She programmed the kitchen for a simple meal. Though she enjoyed cuisine and was herself an excellent cook, tonight she didn't feel like doing the job. Next she savored a hot shower. Emerging, clad in a woolly robe, she felt much happier. Her timing was precise, as usual; half an hour remained before dinner. Because of the state of her mucous membranes, she

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chose to relax with a martini instead of a joint, and because the water had made her deliciously lazy, she changed her mind about Beethoven's Ninth and dialed the hifi for Schubert's gentle, sparkling "Trout" quintet.

Leaned back in a lounger, among familiar furnishings, carpet, drapes, books, pictures, the last including an animation of Cape Cod surf that could never weary her, window framing a view of spectacular towers, music lilting, softness changing beneath her at every slight motion to fit every contour, she thought half drowsily: *Yes, life is good, on the whole. Those last two years with Cy, when we knew we were drifting apart and tried not to but couldn't do anything about it except quarrel . . . the final break . . . those hurt. Badly. However, they're behind us; neither would want to go back; I wonder if in time we may not become pretty close friends. —And Andy Almeida gave me a jolt. Let's be honest, his ideas may have a measure of truth. Yet not a full measure, surely, and nothing that can't be worked out. I do belong on the team. May I say "angels' advocate"? —Probably another man will come along, more understanding than Cy, and I hope by then I'll also have grown a little in understanding, in knowing how to give. —M-m-m, that noodle sauce smells great—*

The door chimed.

What? The guards weren't supposed to let anybody at her.

Well, they couldn't control her fellow tenants. Though conurb families characteristically held aloof from each other, she knew a fraction of her neighbors, had been to dinner and the like. If this was a celebrity-hunting stranger, she'd enjoy directing him to hell. Her lips tightened. But how could she escape the well-meant visit of a Sue Robbins or a John and Edith Lombardi?

The door kept chiming. *Could be urgent. If not, I'll claim a migraine.* Sighing, Yvonne hauled herself erect and walked to the scanner. She pushed the vision button.

While the face that appeared in the screen was unfamiliar, thick-boned and jowly, the body wore a blue Eisenhower uniform. "What do you wish?" Yvonne said. "I asked not to be disturbed."

"I know, Dr. Canter," was the gruff reply. "I read the orders board, and I'm sorry. Uh, this is kind of special, maybe. Several of us in the guards, living and working here in the same place as you, we decided we'd like to show our appreciation. Nothing fancy, we know you're tired and don't want company, it's just we can't send this through the mails legal and a delivery tube seemed kind of, well, cold." He held up a ribbon-wrapped carton of joints. "This is your brand, isn't it, ma'm? Cuban Gold? I won't stay a minute. Got to get home myself."

"Why—oh, how touching. You're too sweet." *I wouldn't go through that much pot in a year. Still, why hurt their feelings? That's an expensive blend.* Yvonne pushed the admittance button. The door slid aside, the man stepped through, the door closed again.

He tossed the carton aside and drew his left-hip pistol. It was not the anesthetic needler, it was the .38

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caliber automatic, and the mouth gaped monstrous. She stumbled back. A half scream broke from her.

"Sorry, lady," the man said perfunctorily. "Want to say your prayers?"

"No—no—go away—" Yvonne retreated, hardly able to whisper the words, hands raised as if to fend off his bullet. He followed. His coolness capped the horror.

"Nothing personal," he said. "Got a contract on you, is all. Don't know from who. Maybe one of those warpheads that go after anybody famous? Now look, I can't afford a lot of time."

Yvonne stopped in the middle of the living room. He did the same. Suddenly the spaciousness she had loved became endlessness. A gray infinity of rug stretched about her and him, toward walls gone unreal and receding like distant galaxies. The breath sobbed in and out of her. The music had grown tinny. Otherwise there was no noise, no life, no help, nothing. Her garrisoned, soundproofed, automated fortress locked her off from the world.

She went through a moment's whirling and night. She came out of it to find her intelligence clear and swift. Terror churned beneath—*this can't be happening to me, to Me, Yvonne Philippa Berdt Canter whose family loves her, who has talked with a being from the stars—someday, yes, someday, more far off and hazy than those walls—not this night, though, this night when the furniture is solid and my nose drinks plain cooking odors as well as the stench of my death-cold sweat*—but she knew with machine calm that she had nothing to lose, and she heard herself ask:

"What can I give you to let me live?"

"Nothing," the man in blue answered. "I'd be dead myself too soon afterward."

"Ten minutes? Five?"

"I said you could pray if you want."

"I don't want. I want to live. My life's been too long in my head, I've denied my body too long." She let her robe drop on the floor and held out her arms. "Take as long as you want," she said.

"Huh?" The pistol jerked in his hand. "You crazy?"

"No. I'm buying two things, a little more life and something to fill it. The bedroom's this way." Yvonne turned and scampered across the rug. Her shoulders ached with the tension of expecting a bullet to smash between them. His footfalls came slowly behind. However bemused, he knew there was no rear door to the outside.

Yvonne ran into the kitchen. She unfolded the screen behind her and snatched a boiling saucepan off the stove. The jowly man shoved the screen aside. She cast the pan into his face and herself to the floor.

The gun crashed like doomsday. His scream was louder. He wabbled back out of sight, pawing at his eyes. "You bitch, you bitch—" She grabbed the dropped pistol and pursued him. He stood swaying. Noodles dripped grotesquely from his inflamed countenance. He got an eye open. "Bitch, bitch," he groaned and reached for his needler. She knew she

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was no markswoman. A heavy gun would buck and miss for her. She sprang to him, rammed the muzzle against his belly, leaned behind it, held it in both hands and squeezed. The explosion half deafened her. He lurched back. She followed, squeezing and squeezing, until after he lay fallen and jerked only because of the slugs' impact, until repeated clicks told her the chamber was empty and she could collapse shrieking into his blood.

VII

ALMEIDA took a chair. Nurses passed to and fro beyond the open door of the otherwise private hospital room.

"A pity you killed him," he said.

"I'll have nightmares the rest of my life," she answered dully.

He patted her hand, which lay lax on the bed coverlet. "No, you won't," he said. "You're too sensible. You took a bad shock, and rest and tranquilizers are prescribed. However, I'll bet they discharge you inside a week. In fact, no one here cautioned me about avoiding excitement. That animal was overdue for killing. Don't waste sympathy on his hypothetical deprived childhood. Spend your goodwill on the billions who need and deserve it. Don't worry about legal complications, either. Your case has been closed. Not that it was ever really open. An Orthian defending herself against a murderer from the Underworld—the matter could've been a lot less clear-cut and the authorities would not have cared. They remember the revolutionary era."

"I've been told. But thanks." Yvonne stirred. "I don't feel too unhappy at the moment," she said. "Nor happy. My emotions are flat. Drugs, I know. In an intellectual way, I wonder what will come when I'm released and the drugs wear off."

"You'll see the incident in perspective and start enjoying life as before. Your therapist promised me on his reputation you would. He's handled really tough cases. Yours is practically routine, about on a par with a sensitive person who's witnessed a nasty accident."

"Well, maybe. I do plan to move. Not because I'm scared but because that apartment will always be where the thing happened."

"Sure. We approve. We'll help you find an address that can be kept confidential till this trouble's been disposed of. That's why I said, pity you killed the swine. We could've gotten a lead. Might've had to narcoquiz, which would mean we couldn't prosecute afterward, but our real interest is naturally in who hired him and why."

"Have you any clues?" Yvonne asked with a flicker of interest.

"Well, an identification. Never mind the name. A known gunman, though he'd escaped conviction for murder; the time he served was for lesser offenses. The police are checking his associates. Military intelligence and the FBI are cooperating, plus following separate lines of investigation, which is why I keep saying 'we.'"

"On my account?" Yvonne shook her head. The gesture felt odd on a pillow. "The hirer must be simply a . . . madman. He probably believes the Sigman has designs on humanity."

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"I wish that's true." Almeida's expression bleakened and his voice turned cold. "Bad enough if so. The Underworld's mercenaries don't come cheap. Your attacker was no chance-picked thug, he was a professional of gang war and criminal commando, almost a soldier. We've established that through our informants."

"Do you know how he got into the conurb?"

"Not for certain. He may have strolled into the public section, as if to buy something, and kept mingling with legitimate people in restaurants, stores, 24-hour bars, that kind of place, till gossip told him you'd returned and he slipped on his fake uniform in a lavatory booth. If he acted cool, he'd've had a good chance of walking right by the elevator guard for the residential levels. But I suspect, instead, a front man rented an apartment in advance where he could den. We're checking on recent tenants, especially those who haven't been at home lately. Takes time, given the large and mobile population."

Almeida's scowl grew darker. "If a foreign power is out to do you in, Yvonne, hoping to delay our rapport with the Sigman, we're worse off," he continued. "They have agents in our ranks—well, seeing we have agents in theirs, I'd be surprised to learn different—and maybe they'll manage to keep track of what we're doing."

"Oh, Andy!" she said. "That's paranoid. How could I be worth a great country's attention?"

"You're being reasonable again," he chided. "The fact is, here and there various governments contain paranoiacs."

Yvonne was faintly surprised that she chuckled. "Who are out to get me."

Almeida sighed. "Let's not argue. Will you agree your safety is desirable?"

"I *won't* live under constant guard. You don't know how I've always pitied the White House family."

"I can guess." Almeida eased a bit and spoke around a slight smile. "Forcing you into a real nervous breakdown won't help us. And you could well be right, that this was a wild one-shot attempt. Would you consider taking a vacation in a safe spot for, m-m, two-three weeks or a month? Meanwhile we'll carry on our manhunt. If we don't succeed, we'll anyway have time to work out security measures that won't intrude on your private life."

After a few seconds she nodded. "Okay. My therapist does advise a trip. Mind you, no secret agent tagging along and staring at me. The mere possibility of there being one would drive me off the track."

"I was afraid you'd say that."

"Who knows, given peace and quiet, I might get a few fresh ideas. Have you a suggestion?"

"Yes," Almeida said promptly. "In fact, I've already arranged it, subject to your approval. I'll know you're safe, if you observe a few sensible precautions, and you'll know I can't have planted a bodyguard on you—not in such a close-knit, stiff-necked outfit. The *Long Serpent*."

"The what?"

"Flagship of a sea gypsy fleet,

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currently in mid-Pacific. She takes occasional passengers, in delightful accommodations, lots of fun—if and only if the admiral approves of them. In your case, he fell over himself to issue an invitation, soon's I called him. We can flit you there secretly."

Yvonne frowned. "Sea gypsies? I'm afraid I'd feel uncomfortable among Byworlders."

"The Vikings aren't, especially, in spite of their flamboyant name," Almeida assured her. "The most eccentric gaggle of ocean wanderers is nowhere near as far gone as the Amazons or the Creative Anachronists or—well, a lot of self-styled Orthians too, considering what odd little businesses they're apt to run. The sea has less tolerance for peculiar behavior than the land. Besides, it takes considerable capital to build a ship of the kind required, let alone a fleet. The Vikings keep no particular religion or social ideology or what have you. They're mostly a bunch of hardheaded Norwegians who decided that for them there was more freedom and elbow room and probably more income on the water than on the land. I'm sure you'll enjoy them. And you'll be safer than anyplace this side of Apollo Station."

Yvonne yielded. "For that long a speech, Andy, you deserve to win."

The big news broke the day after Skip had talked to Keough. "This changes every configuration," the Tuatha chief said. "Stick around a while. I might wangle you a direct interview with Dr. Canter."

She had become the obvious target, especially after the general nature of her idea was described. It tied straight into Skip's hypothesis, convincing him he was right. Nevertheless, the owners of impeccable credentials were standing in kilometers-long lines—thought his metaphorically slanted mind—for a short visiphone conversation. What priority would a broke 22-year-old drifter be assigned?

"Patience, son," Keough advised. "I'm making calls halfway 'round the world in both directions on your behalf. Not telling what your idea is. You've earned the right to spring that, and besides, you make it more convincing than I could. I only say you're worth listening to on the Sigman matter. You know, I never stopped to figure till you pointed it out, how many channels to how many offices I've got. My name's good among a hundred scientific and engineering leaders, and a percentage of 'em owe me favors. Chances don't look too bad. So, as I'd tell a Japanese about to commit hara-kiri, contain yourself."

Skip did, that first tremendous week, largely by wangling a temporary pick-and-shovel job which cast him into sleep each evening. The next several days, with nothing but rehash on the casts, were more difficult. When the announcement finally came that Yvonne Canter had sought seclusion after an assassination attempt on her, he tossed on his bunk the whole night. Next morning, red-eyed and tangle-haired, he bulled his way past underlings to Keough.

The chief was in the headquarters shack. The sophisticated gear of

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communication and computation stood incongruous against plain plastiboard walls and windows filled by a mountain. A breeze gusted through, bearing odors of pine, noises of machinery. Keough glanced from his desk. "Hullo," he said. "You're early. Sit."

Skip slumped into a chair. "You heard, sir?" he mumbled.

"Yeah. Right after the event. You know now they suppressed the information till they got things squared away. But my tentacles reach into the Denver police lab."

"And you didn't tell me?" Skip lacked the strength to feel indignant. "Well, this closes the direct route. Could you please start me on a new heading?"

"Contrariwise," Keough said, "you should consider it a lucky break, far's you're concerned."

"What?"

"I know where she is. I can put you there."

The word was like a thunderbolt. Skip could merely gape.

Keough looked stern. "I will, provided you make some promises. If you break them, you'll be kicked out so fast your guts will wrap around your tonsils; and I'll make a point of roasting you over a radioactive fire afterward. That woman's had a very foul experience, right on top of several days that must have drained her to the bottom. She is not to be pestered. Let her take the initiative. If you can't make her do that, come back here and we will begin over."

Skip swallowed. Tiredness dropped away beneath a quickening heartbeat. "Y-yes, sir. I promise."

Keough relaxed. "I figured you would. And I figure you can be trusted. I've been asking around about you, here and there. Okay. A good many years back, before I became boss of this tribe, we were working on the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. You may recall they had an international crash project to save it. Among the collaborators, for shipping and their special expertise, was a fleet of Norsky sea gypsies. I got friendly with a skipper who's since risen to admiral, and we've kept in touch. I mentioned your problem to him. The chances there looked faint. However, what the hell, why not invest a few minutes?

"My long shot paid off. He called me yesterday evening. Wasn't supposed to, but he'd given no oath, and when the American agents tried to browbeat him into accepting one of theirs aboard in disguise, he got his back up. That's an independent bunch of bastards. He knew I'd be discreet and that I wouldn't have sponsored you for no reason.

"That's where she is, Skip. In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, loafing toward Maury Station and Los Angeles, which last is where she gets off."

"And you'll flit me?" Skip breathed.

"Uh-huh. By the way, when he called me the admiral was undecided whether to admit you or not. I promised you'd tickle his crew's fancy. They don't see many amusing newcomers en route. That turned the balance, so don't let me down. What I'll actually do is give you a plane ticket to Hawaii and money to hire a private

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'copter from there, plus modest expenses on board."

"I . . . don't know how to thank you, sir."

"Well, a cliche like that is not the way," Keough grinned. "Remember me when you're rich and famous. Seriously, I believe you're on to something important and the sooner you're given a hearing, the better."

Skip sat quiet a while. Finally he ventured, "I'd never have expected her to take refuge in the Byworld. From what the news accounts said, she's kind of, uh, spinsterish, in spite of having been married. Is that why they chose the fleet—for a hidey hole nobody'd guess at?"

"Who says all the sea gypsies belong in the Byworld?"

"Why, isn't that what the word means? People who've left the conventional way of the Ortho but not gone into crime like the Underworld? I haven't made it to any argonaut community myself, but I've read and heard—like one of them belongs to the Mormon Revivalists, another to the Free Basques—"

Skip's recollection trailed on: *You have your ships built, nuclear-powered, loaded with the materials reuse equipment developed for bases on the moon and Mars, able to keep the sea indefinitely. You fish; harvest plankton; process water for minerals, weed for food and fabric; prospect the bottom for ore and oil, maybe under contract; do tramp cargo carrying; whatever's handy. Your brokers ashore haul away and sell what you've produced, buy and haul back what you need. You've registered your ships in a primitive country with bribeable rulers; you take out nominal citizenship there yourself; the rulers pass laws which make your group, for practical purposes, a sovereign state that can do anything it wants, provided it stays within international waters and international law about stuff like navigation and conservation. —Hey, what marvelous luck! I get to see Yvonne Canter* and *a gypsy fleet!*

Keough's words reduced his excitement a fraction: "The Vikings are different. Sure, they fly the Pasalan flag, but just to get out from under the welfare state at home. They consider themselves the respository of the old-fashioned Northern virtues."

"For which they stand four-squarehead," Skip chortled. He bounced to his feet. "Whoo-ee! I'm really on my way? Wow and yow!" He flung the door open and cartwheeled forth across the ground. He returned in a minute, playing "Sweet Betsy From Pike" on a harmonica snatched out of his pocket.

VIII

MASSIVE, SLOW-SPOKEN Admiral Granstad and family invited the passengers to dinner in their suite. Yvonne Canter was introduced as "Yolanda Cohen." Skip didn't contradict. Poor thing, she looked altogether empty, save for a ghost behind her eyes.

"Are you a student, Mr. Wayburn?" He could barely hear her routine-polite inquiry.

"No," he said. "I'm kind of looking

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around."

"Oh," she said. For the rest of the evening she spoke little, mostly when spoken to. He didn't see her in the next three days, except briefly and distantly. Though they were the only two outsiders, seclusion wasn't hard to manage. *Ormen den Lange* was enormous. Besides command posts and offices, it housed in ample quarters 4000 men, women, and children, schools, hospital, cultural and recreational facilities, and an astounding variety of small private enterprises.

Skip no longer minded biding his time. It brimmed with fun and fascination. His bachelor cabin, however comfortable and charmingly decorated, was simply to wash and sleep in. Otherwise he was exploring the ship and its half-dozen companions. The latter were more interesting technically; they did the work, whereas *Ormen* was like a floating conurb, linked to the rest of the planet in standard electronic ways. But the flagship had the sports and games, the delightful informal restaurants and taverns and live theater, the people.

These Vikings might exalt honest toil (well, actually, competent and conscientious use of the machines that did the toiling) and self-reliance. However, they weren't dour about it. Instead, they were as jolly a lot as Skip had ever encountered. The average upper-class Orthian was doubtless more hard-driving, well-informed, thoroughly trained, including in the new mental disciplines which could evoke effective genius from ordinary cerebral endowment; but he was also anomic, chronically anxious, inwardly alone: a sane and realistic logician, emotionally crazy as a hoot owl.

The oldest Vikings kept youthful spirits. And the younger adults immediately swarmed over Skip. They spoke excellent English. He was the first sigaroon most of them had encountered. They reveled in what he could offer, and vied to interest and divert him in return. His first three nights after the Granstads' stiffish dinner, he was carousing till implausible hours. On the morning of the fourth day, a stunning blonde nurse he'd met in the course of this invited him to eat at her place after she got off work. She made it clear that that wasn't all she was inviting him for.

Sure, let sunshine and sea air draw La Canter out of her shell. First she has to satisfy herself I can't possibly be a G-man. Dunno why she objects so violently to being guarded—touch-me-not personality reinforced to an unreasonable degree by her nervous condition, I suppose—but if it's a fact that the US government had to accommodate to, I can do the same. Next she has to get acquainted with me. Well, okay. We don't reach port for quite a spell.

Intending to be properly rested for the evening ahead, Skip took his sketchbook and colored pencils onto a promenade deck. He was alone there; the population was at its jobs or in its schools. *My chance to try drawing waves, not making them.*

The scene cried for a thousand different pictures. Below the bleached mahogany and ropework safety rails of

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this high place, the superstructure fell down, fore and aft, occasionally rearing back aloft, in a many-shadowed intricacy not unlike a pastel-and-white, streamlined Grand Canyon. Often its severity was relieved by miniature parks or hanging gardens. Beyond, the remaining fleet was strewn across kilometers. The lean-hulled service vessel paced closest; a hum from one of its machine shops drifted to him. Further out, a squat factory ship processed kelp harvested elsewhere; water roiled white at the intake and exhaust pipes of a mineral-extractor craft; the trawler was more distant, almost on the gigantic circumference of vision. The sea surges were wrinkled, foam-laced, royal blue shading to clear green under the crests and soft almost-black in the troughs, forever moving, alive with change, like the blood in a man's heart. Diamond dust gleamed and danced, cast by the sun out of a gentle sky where two or three bright clouds drifted.

Stabilized, *Ormen* was free from roll, and its nuclear engine made neither smoke nor noise. A low vibration did pervade the hull, again reminding Skip of the pulse inside himself. The ocean rushed, boomed, hissed, laughed, beneath a lulling cool wind that carried odors of salt, iodine, ozone. The wind rumpled Skip's hair and tried to play with his sketchbook. He swore at it, cheerfully because he liked the song it blew, of the leagues upon leagues it had fared and the wanderings still to come.

"Good morning, Mr. Wayburn."

He turned, caught off guard by the soprano voice. "Uh, good morning, Dr. Can—Miss Cohen." *Damn! I was supposed to play along unless/until she admits who she is.*

She regarded him fairly calmly. "Canter, were you about to say? You're not the first. I do resemble her. Not surprising. We're second cousins."

"Oh. Well, I will be unique and not bug you for details about your famous relative," answered Skip, giving thanks to any gods who might expect it. "I'll bet you've scarcely met her."

"You'd win your bet."

That she could lie thus easily indicated she was making a fast recovery. Furthermore, while her tunic and slacks formed a prim contrast to the sloppiness of his coverall, their buttercup color must reflect a degree of cheerfulness. Her lost weight had just begun coming back; high cheekbones and arched nose stood forth hatchet-like. Yet the ponytailed hair shone ebony, the tilted and really rather lovely eyes were no longer dark-rimmed, the lips—their remaining paleness not hidden by cosmetics—curved in a smile that was small, a wee bit frightened, nevertheless a genuine smile.

"I didn't want to avoid you," Skip said, "nor bother you either. The admiral's wife told me you need a rest."

"I hate to . . . seem rude," she said hesitantly. "Mrs. Granstad told you aright. Finding you when I came up here—" She groped out a cigarette from her beltpurse and struck it.

"Please don't think you have to make conversation. In fact, I can leave. I've plenty else to keep me out of mischief, or in it as the case may be."

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Her smile revived, a little larger. "Yes, I noticed you off and on. Cutting quite a social swath, no? And I see you're an artist."

"Gnawing away at it. I'm afraid these billows of mine won't give Hokusai much competition."

"May I see?" she asked. He handed her the book. She studied his sketch with what he believed was appreciation. "Why, that's excellent. The way you catch the interference patterns—Have you more? May I look through?"

"If you want. Mainly they're doodles. Or cartoons. I drew this, for instance, on the chopper that brought me here."

A laugh, weak but a laugh, broke from her. The picture showed two real Vikings, in horned helmets and ringmail, who stood on a fjord shore watching a longship sail past. One said to the other: "He's a pretty peaceable fellow, you know." The figurehead on the ship and the tail on the sternpost were those of a mouse.

"You could sell such things, I'm sure," she said.

Skip shrugged. "Sometimes I do, like to a small-town paper. The big periodicals take too long to reply. Chances are I'd be elsewhere when they did, leaving no forwarding address."

"Indeed?" She returned his book and inhaled slowly of her cigarette, studying him edgewise. "How come?"

"I'm a sigaroon. Migratory jack-of-miscellaneous-trades, entertainer, you name it and I'll tell you what to feed it."

"Pardon me, you look too young for that."

"Younger'n I am. I turned officially adult four years back. That's when I went on the wing."

He had tried it almost two years earlier, but had been caught. The officer who made the arrest took him for a ratpack type and administered a skillful beating. Because his restlessness had brought ever more friction into familial relationships, his parents consented to his three months' commitment to a juvenile rehabilitation center. There the authorities weren't cruel, but he was soon ready to vomit with boredom.

Why mention it? What embitterment had been in him was long since blown out by the many winds he had felt.

"And you're obviously well-educated," Yvonne Canter said.

"A lot of us are." Skip explained the background and philosophy of his part of the Byworld. She was a good listener. "I've lots of respectable friends," he finished, "including the man who arranged for me to visit here."

He could guess her thought: *An influential friend, to arrange his passage simultaneously with mine. Not that the Vikings are bound to obey directives from the American government. They find its goodwill useful, though. —Well, he seems pleasant and harmless. I won't complain.*

Skip's task was to make himself more than "pleasant and harmless" in her eyes. An awkwardness had descended. She said lamely, "I wonder where their submarine is today."

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"They collect manganese nodules off the bottom," he replied. "I was told it's scouting for new territory, like the farmer's cat."

"What?"

"Nothing," he said in haste. She might find the joke a trifle too earthy. "You know, Miss Cohen, I'd be glad to do your portrait if you'd sit. At your convenience, naturally, and you could keep the result. You have an exotic look that challenges me."

"Oh? How?" Pinkness crept into the ivory cheeks, and the lashes fluttered. She was not so far off the human female norm that she didn't enjoy a compliment.

"Hold still a minute, please, and I'll try to show you." He flipped to a fresh page. Clutching book and pencil box in the left hand, he circled back and forth around her, crouched, cocked his head, finally settled on an angle of view and started drawing. Though she had finished her smoke, and perhaps wished for another, she held her pose, stiffly and self-consciously.

His pencil flew, leaving a trail of curves and shadings. He had intended to glamorize as much as he guessed he could without insulting her intelligence. But as the picture grew, the concept did likewise. *Erase this line, that shadow, damnation, they're wrong! She* is *beautiful—austere beauty, half abstract, like Death Valley or a Monterey cypress bent and strained by a century of storms.* "Excuse me, I've had a misfire, would you hang on for an extra two-three minutes?" *Better not make those comparisons aloud. She'd doubtless misunderstand.* "There! Thanks a googolplex. It's rough, but maybe you can see what I saw."

He ripped off the sheet and gave it to her. She made a low noise of astonishment. Color mounted and sank in her face. Her index finger searched along his perspectives. He had done more than subtly emphasize her best features, he had captured a quality of bowstring tautness. The slightly Oriental cast of countenance remained, but the clothes flowed back around bosom and leg in a manner to recall Nike of Samothrace, and the rail behind her was shown from a point which made it clear that she was looking into the sky.

"I never . . . Remarkable," she breathed. "You make me appear more strenuous than I am—"

Oh, no, Yvonne.

"—or am I reading something in that nobody else would? What a souvenir!" Her glance dropped. "If it's for me," she said uncertainly.

"Why, sure, if you want," Skip told her. " 'S nothing more than a cartoon, in the original sense of the word." Outrageous, the idea bounced through his mind of adding the Sigman and a caption. ("Now what did it mean by *that?*" Or: "Does its language consist *entirely* of smut?" Or— "I'm really trying to sell you on letting me paint you," he reminded her. *Your portrait, I should say, though you know, when you've put on a few more kilos I could have fun—Whoa, horsie.*

"I'll have to think about it. Your offer is most kind, of course." She struck a fresh cigarette. Hastily, as if to steer conversation from herself: "You must have earned by your talent

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WAR OF THE DOOM ZOMBIES

OVA HAMLET

As told to RICHARD A. LUPOFF

Illustrated by BILL GRAHAM

Once again the redoubtable Mrs. Hamlet returns, full this time of those half-digested works of Sword & Sorcery which form such a noble heritage for our field, to tell a story of much derring and some do, a story about a Barbarian Hero among Barbarian Heroes, Upchuck the Mighty! Or, as Richard Lupoff (her keeper), puts it, "I don't think I can cram this *one into my novel* Sacred Locomotive Flies—*thank goodness!"*

AYE, men call me Upchuck and tremble. Upchuck the Barbarian I am, am I, and my fame is spread from the ancient lands of the Delwara Basin to the Valley of the Terraplane, and rare it is for the immortal Upchuck to flee from any foe, be he man or beastie.

But flee I did, I, Upchuck, tumbling and panting down the face of Pappalardi Mountain, scrambling before the broken pottery and dirty water flung after me by yon harridans in the Cave of Women high on the western face of the mountain. "Out, amscray!" their shrill voices rang yet in mine beet-colored ears, "come back when you get some meat on your scrawny frame and some hair on your pimply cheeks!"

Shaking my fist at the Cave I vaulted upon the splendid shanks of my she-horse Heroine and spurred away from this place of shame and wickedness. Aha, though, laughed I to myself, taunt me though they may for my seeming youth, yet will those wenches grow feeble with age, their magnificent breasts (O, slobber!) withered and their voluptuous hips (aye, grind and grimace!) softened and spread ere grow locks upon the cheeks (or the belly!) of Upchuck!

Such be's my secret, and secret 'twill remain, mine only and thine, thou reader of mine screed!

As Heroine carried me sedately along the rock-bestrewn path leading away from Pappalardi I stopped to pop a particularly noisome carbuncle from between my eyes, listing with glee to the merry sound as pus parted from Upchuck and sailed to land with a tiny *plop* in the dirt beside Heroine's ill-shod hoof. I dug spurry heels into Heroine's bony flanks and proceeded to check my accouterment as the gallant mare advanced from her plodding walk into an exhilarating trot.

Atop my somewhat dusty pate perched my ancient peaked cap Skullwarmer. About my splendid torso there hung limply my ancient leather jerkin Lotion. Athwart my fine legs there clung my ancient trousers

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Gravyshedder. Upon my athlete's feet were snugly laced my ancient boots, upon the left foot Ed and upon the right Fred.

I was well satisfied with the completeness and good condition of my garb, and had nigh begun to burst into a song of my own improvisation when there appeared before me on the trail a sight of such imposing mien as to make me rein in and reach for my trusty weapons, survivors both of the ancient times before the unspeakable cataclysm of which we moderns are wont so often to speak. Gladly felt I Hoodsticker my ancient gravity knife and Punkzapper my ancient zip gun!

"Ho, fellow!" challenged I, backwards speaking ever as. "Thy garb marks thee a sorcerer as! Be'est though one of white or of black sorcery?"

"Tell I not the color of my tricks till I see the color of thy stash, youngun," rejoined the mage, nodding his peaked cap and gesturing significantly at the cashpurse (Ari) which dangled from my leathern belt (Hickock). A crafty one, this could I detect at once!

"I hie Upchuck," told I the necromancer, and "Upchuck hie I" repeated I, performing a courtesy in case he be hard of hearing and completing a palindrome into the bargain, a little trick which it pleases me occasionally to perform.

"That be no palindrome" challenged the stranger. "Madam, I'm Adam, *that* be such, or Sam, no toot-toot on Mas, though I admit I ken not the meaning of such."

"Ay, well," quoth I demolishing his feeble argument, " 'tmay be as 'tis, 'tis still as 'twas!" This logic have I found

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ever proof against the sophistry of wise and pseudo-wise disputers.

"Seemst troubled, youth," mumbled yon mage. "Mayhap can I aid thee in thy need, canst but pay some modest price to sustain an ancient wise man. Tax deductible as well, be I non-prophet as I be."

"Well, tell who arst," quoth I.

"I heit Mus Domesticus, once apprentice now sorcerer in full," he proclaimed. "Philtres and spells deal I to all and sundry, aye, with quantity discounts and student's specials. Looketh to me as if thou couldst use a magicke of pimple cream, lad, following which I swow as thy lady love may look upon thy suit more kindly than she has."

Now we were to serious business, but evening as well was in its approach, and dark clouds too seemed to be bellying up from the Bay of the Jam-makers, so I courteously suggested that Master Mus and I dismount and make camp beneath a sheltering rock which I noticed conveniently beside our trail. We dislodged a nesting firedrake and roasted her eggs for dinner while we bargained over Mus's services.

"You be a mere lad seeking the pleasures of manhood, be you not?" quoth the sorcerer.

"Nay, O wizened one," rejoined I. "Stranger than that be my tale, nor could seer's potion give you vision of my truth. What number of summers think you I have seen?"

Deep peered he into my eyes, his own blazing with a strange and sinister inner flame. "Some fifteen summers," quoth he "since first peeped thine orbs at thy dam's adoring phiz, and fifteen winters since thy lips sought warm and nourishing pap."

Roaring with laughter and pulling another roasted egg from the campfire I clapped the ancient on the shoulder and wiped my tear-wettened eyes with my other hand, while rubbing my belly merrily with the other and loosening my jerkin Lotion for greater comfort. With singed fingers I proceeded to peel away the shell of my roast egg, reaching for Mus's generously proferred wineskin with my free hand and pointing gleefully at his astounded countenance with the other.

"Eh, that be a neat trick with thy hands," he said. "Wouldst teach it to an old man in need of every shtick he can learn?"

"For a price, mayhap," intimated I, "but first my tale, and to see what canst do to aid my need."

Now launched I into mine standard autobiography, which manufacture I an excuse to cram into every Upchuck story, which the experienced reader will skip over with a groan but which the neophyte will devour with incredible enrapturement.

"Men think me a stripling youth of fifteen, and so seem I to all. And yet for as long as memory serveth have I looked as I look now. My skin as ever marked with the eczema, my voice as ever cracking and high, my cheeks sprouting irregular patches of fuzz and my pubes giving forth a call which no wench has yet deigned to satisfy.

"Fifteen, am I? I, Upchuck, was fifteen when thou, ancient sorcerer, were but a pewling tad. I was fifteen when thy pa was a tad. I was fifteen, by the god Yogh-Iberra, when the ancient

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crone Doris Day was a fleshy and well-juiced maid of but forty-five or fifty."

" 'Ware blasphemy!" shouted Mus Domesticus. "The Madonna Day hath been a virginal twenty-one for sixty years or more."

Angrily I leaped to my feet, prepared to draw my ancient gravity knife Hoodsticker, only I cracked my pate upon the overhanging rock and avoided a real ear-ringer only through the good services of Skullwarmer my woolen cap. Calming myself I reverted to iron-clad logic once again.

"Isn't!" I shouted at the sorcerer.

"Is too!" he countered.

"Isn't!"

"Is!"

"Isn't!"

"Is!"

Thus we struggled, our brilliant arguments and counter-arguments continuing far into the night, and would have gone on far longer had not a voice thundered from on high "Two cents a word is two cents a word, but get moving quick or giffs der dejection shlipp!"

"Well then," the ancient one murmured, "sip a few drops of this and you shall awaken in the morning an older man indeed." Saying this he reached into his saddle bag and drew forth a vial of greenish, glittering liquid.

I reached eagerly and took the vial from him. I held it before my eye, studying it in the light of the campfire that crackled and sputtered between the magician and myself. Through the liquid the flames seemed living things and Mus Domesticus seemed to waver and reform into a strange creature with huge, round black ears, a mouth all on one side of his face, and three fingers on each hand. "Drink it," he said in a mild, tenor voice.

I unstoppered the vial and tilted back my head, swirling the greenish contents around in my mouth before swallowing. "Umm," I said, "tastes like toothpaste," and collapsed into the campfire.

Mus Domesticus must have been less than a total villain, for he pulled my unconscious head back out of the campfire before robbing me of Punkzapper, Hoodsticker, Ed, Fred, and my stash. He left me Heroine, Skullwarmer, Lotion and Gravyshedder.

I awakened with an angry firedrake kicking embers in my face, rose chagrined and began to make my way after the charlatan. Which way would the wily sorcerer Mus Domesticus head? He was riding toward Pappalardi Mountain when first we encountered. Would he proceed now, or, being wily, would he expect me to remember his original direction and follow, and would he instead double back across the Plain of Euclid whence he had come? Or, expecting me to second-guess his intention thusly, would he third-guess me and head toward Pappalardi Mountain? Or, expecting me to fathom his intention to third-guess me . . .

On and on it went, until I decided to assume a more powerful strategy and flip a coin. With my purse gone I was unable to do this, so instead placed one hand over my eyes, turned widdershins three times, staggered about a bit, and then opened my eyes to see which way

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the God Yogh-Iberra directed me.

Twas across the barren Plain of Euclid, toward the dire and malign and ill-famed, infamous and despised Dukedom of Poughkeepsie.

I climbed once more aboard Heroine's brawny withers and slapped her flank affectionately, whispering sweetly in her soft ear "Move along O noble she-horse, or to knackers you'll go."

Heroine, as ever, responded to kindness and persuasion, and soon we found ourselves gazing upward at the blazing orb that illuminated the Plain of Euclid.

O ye who read this chronicle, if yet in yon distant day men know the Plain of Euclid no more needst I say, but if it be sealed off and forgotten, read ye of that place of desolation. Flat it is as the face of a pond, its smooth surface broken only by the occasional rippling of the dreaded sine waves. Deadly tribes of isoceles and secants struggle endlessly for possession of the Obtuse and the Acute.

Terrifying tangents accompanied as ever by their cotangents drop perpendiculars at a moment's warning, impaling unwary tribesmen of the Geometers and Trigonometers amidships.

Far, far across the Plain saw I Mus Domesticus, or anyway a tiny black dot silhouetted against the blinding white of the Plain which I took to be the traitorous sorcerer. Onward urged I my faithful horse Heroine, she crying and moaning in her thirst as my eyes alternately scanned the Plain in search of drink and sought ever to keep visual touch with Mus.

At last there rose on the edge of the Plain greener woodlands and the towering towers of ill-starred Poughkeepsie. Long before Heroine and I could reach the city's walls the tiny dot that was Mus Domesticus disappeared, swallowed up into that city of darkness and sin.

Shades of evening were falling and the cool of that country's far-famed night had begun to descend ere my faithful mare and I reached the far edge of the Plain of Euclid. Approaching the city gate of towering and mystery-shrouded Poughkeepsie I drew back the mighty right fist that had been so oft the despair of foeman and friend alike and pounded thrice upon the city gate, hurling a resounding bell-like challenge through the guard posts and alleyways of Poughkeepsie.

Boom!
Boom!
Boom!
Boom!

From within the wall there came a scurrying and mumbling as of many hoofs and mouths, then opened there a peephole in the wall and down peered a baleful eye at me, balefully.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" it demanded.

"I be Upchuck the Barbarian," I responded. "Warlock of Secaucus, Master of the Galloping Pack and Champion of the Annual Intramural Track Meet. I seek a foully treacherous conjurer, the evil and ill-visaged Mus Domesticus."

"Very well," quoth the baleful eye. "Pay the toll and what you do inside is your own business."

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"Listen fellow," bellowed I crisply, "the traitor Mus Domesticus hath drugged and robbed me of mine all, and made away with mine stash. Admit me to Poughkeepsie and once I capture the foul Mus pay I your Duke threefold his customed tribute, um, shall, uh, I, uh, I shall." Fough, how I hate these convoluted sentences. But, then, heroic chronicles are heroic chronicles and one must observe the customs of the trade.

The eye was withdrawn, the peephole slammed shut, then a door was opened in the city wall. "I've heard 'em all, a hundred times," the guardsman grumbled. "Look, buster, if you don't have the loot to pay the toll just sign this form FT37-6, Temporary Waiver of City Toll, in sextuplicate, explaining fully your reason for not paying the toll, retain one copy for your own records and come on in. I don't suppose that walking gluepot's registered either." He gestured meanly at Heroine, who ignored the impertinence.

As did I. I signed the waiver and entered ill-famed Poughkeepsie, seeking directions from this passerby and that until an ancient crone directed my path down a dark and foul-smelling alleyway off the Street of the Systems Programmers. At the end of the alley a dim-lit and dirt-encrusted sign proclaimed the Stagger Inn.

Taking care to tether and booby-trap Heroine in the manner long known to the members of my guild, I boldly thrust open the door of the Stagger Inn, finding it less securely bolted than I had anticipated, and stumbled into a smokey and alcoholic tavern populated by brawling townsmen, drunken visitors, loose wenches and long-fingered cutpurses.

I found a newly-vacated table and, when a serving-maid clad in low-cut blouse and well-filled dirndl approached to ask my will I grasped her fleshy wrist in an inconspicuous but painful grip known well to members of my guild and shot at her but three words: "Where be he?"

"Where be who?" she responded. O clever slut!

"The evil sorcerer Mus Domesticus," saith I.

"Oh, ah, aye, sir," wheedled the serving maid, squirming in my iron-like grasp so as to give mine orbs a breathtaking tumble twixt her jollying twin *knockers* (as we call 'em in the guild). "Aye, oh, ah, well, ooh, aiie, if you don't let go my wrist, you squirt, I'll bash in your bloody skull like a grackle's egg!"

With that the high-spirited darling took her free hand and clouted me on the ear so that my head felt as it had the time Heroine accidentally stepped on it whilst I slumbered.

"Well, maid, no need for me to hurt thee - if thee'll just answer my questions," I told the lass.

"Thou," she said.

"Thou what?" I asked.

"Thou'll answer, not thee, thou knot-head," she chirped.

Ah, high spirited womanhood, delight of the world!

"And if you mean the kind old gentleman in the magician's robe," she continued her abject explanation, "he said to take a snack and a tankard on his own tab, and he'll see you in the

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morning."

Could it be? Mayhap, thought I, the sorcerer Mus Domesticus was willing to come to terms. Perhaps he had realized that his victory over Upchuck the Barbarian was but a temporary one, that any man who durst place himself in opposition to the terror out of Secaucus was doomed. If Mus had so realized, mayhap he was seeking to make amends.

"Very well," quoth I to the serving wench. "Bring me a haunch of salmon and a flagon of fermented penguin's milk, and be quick with it. And by the by," I added quickly ere she was away, "what do they call you, my dear?"

She blushed cunningly and curtsied at that sharp sally, and said "Betimes they calls me Blodwen and betimes they calls me other things, but I never me mind so long's they don't call me late for dinner!"

With that she burst into an uproarious tittering and made her way, both jiggling and giggling, to fetch my food and drink. I pointed mine naked feet toward the inn's fireplace to warmth. Sorely did they miss old Ed and Fred, held hostage by Mus Domesticus. Whilst awaiting mine refreshments I occupied myself with listing to the conversations of revelers and merry-makers athwart and abaft my unbroken oaken table.

Nearby a grimy cut-throat and his equally disreputable companion were discussing the local Shire Reeve, one Lawless Quinsana, whose latest exploit had been the arrest and imprisonment of an entire class of choir students *en route* from matins to midday devotions. Shire Reeve Quinsana had accused the younglings of thinking impure thougnts, and had sold them all off into bondage to the Geometers of the Plain of Euclid. None were expected to survive the ordeal.

Afore I could hear more sweet Blodwen returned with a steaming platter which she placed on the oaken board before me. I sampled the dishes thereon and offered her my gallant approval, adding a sly compliment to her maidenly charms. "Wouldst join me in a comfy room above, after thy service ends for the night?" I asked.

"Aye, fuzzycheeks," she assented, "Lord Domesticus's simoleons be as good than any, I'll close mine eyes and think on some fair foreign land whilst I earn my—ugh!—piastres."

Well, ye who read this chronicle, see you now the irresistible appeal with which she was smitten! I downed two, three, many tankards of fermented penguin milk in celebration of my coming-disflowerment, then trembling with anticipation and somewhat nauseous from the amount of penguin's milk I had downed, I staggered barefoot up a narrow flight of stairs flickeringly lighted by a few greasy torches.

Upstairs I flopped across a mattress of straw ticking and hummed a brave tune to myself while I held down my stomach and awaited Blodwen. Here is how went the old folk ballad that I hummed:

Ay, diddle dizzy dilly dummy
Dooby what a hack
Wrote about a dopy fellow
By the name of Brak.
Sing swords and thews and beak-nosed Jews
It's very absurd but it's a penny a word.

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Ay, decades ago there was a guy who wrote

About a goop named Jongor

But the passage of time brought a much worse crime

When another scribbler first invented Thongor.

Sing spells and bells and bottomless wells

And write any junk as long as it sells.

Ay, Kothar, Kandar and the resta them yuks

Can struggle along till things go wrong

And then, you see, if you don't know what to do

You can stop and vamp while someone sings a song.

This stuff is bunk though I guess the author needs it

But what kind of cretin is the idiot who reads it?

By now there were poundings upon the walls of my quarters and angry shouts of protest from other guests of the inn so I ceased my ballading. Admit I will that the meter was imperfect in one or two places, and mayhap the rhyming was a trifle obvious, but then it was an old ballad which I was making up as I went along, and my head was more than slightly bleared.

As well I had raised my dulcet voice in song, though, for now, with only a shy knock to announce her arrival, the voluptuous Blodwen slipped through my doorway, a large drinking-skin—I should guess of rehoboam size—coyly hidden beneath her already amply filled blouse. She bolted the heavily timbered door behind her and crossed the room lightly, seating herself beside me on the bed.

"Hoy there, Blodwen," quoth I, "welcome to my love nest."

"Ooh, fresh," she responded, holding the wineskin to my lips. Deeply quaffed I of its nectar-like contents, lying back with a sigh and beginning to toy with her skirt.

"Why Upchuck," she giggled, "art always so for'ard with the maidens?"

"Mmm," I replied archly. She offered me a bit more of the wineskin and I imbibed deeply, rubbing mine cheek sensuously against her neck.

A few more endearments and a few more sips from the skin and I lay back upon the ticking, struggling to free myself of Lotion and Gravyshedder. The now enchanted Blodwen gave me the wineskin to hold and pressed me down upon the ticking. I felt myself burp once or twice and then all was blackness.

The yellow rays of dawn crept through cracks in the wall of the Stagger Inn and wakened me still there upon the ticking. Lotion and Gravyshedder still clung to me. Mine head was filled with a myriad trolls pounding anvils. Mine stomach was as an angry swamp, sending upward distress signals and sour tastes. I sat myself upon the edge of the bed and found myself barely able to remain upright.

After a while I stumbled down the stairs and found a crew ready to confront me. There stood the tricksy Mus Domesticus, there stood the blowsy and delightful Blodwen, and between them a man of surly mien and foul disposition who introduced himself as the Shire Reeve Quinsana.

"Ay, Reeve," quoth I, "your goodwill is appreciated but I wouldst

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NO EXIT

HANK STINE & LARRY NIVEN

Illustrated by STEVE HARPER

Hank Stine has reviewed books for us here—and his review of television's "The Prisoner" led to his opportunity to write the third book in that series. Larry Niven is a Hugo winner and the author of the recent novel, Ringworld. *Put them both together, and you have—*

THE SMOKE spiraled up from his cigarette, engulfed his head and stung his nose: an acrid, chemical smell. He came back to consciousness and jerked his eyes up from his notebook to the ashtray. The coal was burning the filter. He stabbed it out with a muttered, "Shit."

He squeezed his eyes tightly shut, then opened them. *Now.* He resumed reading, sitting rigid in his armchair, concentrating fiercely on the page of yellow paper in the notebook.

He might have been moving his eyes left to right, left to right, over blank paper. After finishing the first sentence he looked up and tried to visualize what he had read. Impossible. His recalcitrant memory would show him only one thing.

The spiral.

He slammed the book shut and started to throw it at a wall. Instead he got up, set the book aside and began pacing the room. His feet shook the floor as they fell. Down to the window by his littered desk, a pause to stare out at the barber shop across the street, back past the couch and reading lamp to the table with the record player. Halfway through a turn he gave it up and went into the kitchen to make lunch.

Hours ago he'd seen the advertisement on the inside front cover of Popular Mechanics. He'd bought the magazine yesterday and started reading it this morning at breakfast. He hadn't gotten far.

!LEARN HYPNOTISM!

Below the big block letters was a small, closely ruled spiral, a picture of part of the equipment advertised in the mail-order hypnotism course. The original, he read, was the size of a phonograph record, and was meant to be played like one, without the needle.

His eyes were drawn to the center, down into a whirlpool of black and white. And then it started to spin . . . . He gazed at it for minutes, watching the darting illusory line that seemed to shimmer around the center like the gleam of sunlight on a revving propeller.

He jerked his eyes away, annoyed at himself. He was wasting time. He

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turned some pages and started reading.

He couldn't remember, now, what the article was about. He had kept turning back to the inside front cover, where a whirlpool spun in beating tides of grey: motion in a printed page, defying his eyes to find beginning or end. Finally he had thrown the magazine aside and started preparing the next lesson in his Famous Photographer's course.

He couldn't remember what he'd done since.

It wasn't really lunch time, but he felt restless and needed something to do. So he went to the refrigerator, took out a hard boiled egg, some lettuce, mayonnaise, half a lemon, two slices of bread and a tomato, and brought them over to the sideboard. He started grating the egg and mixing in mayonnaise and pepper. Then he remembered what he'd forgotten. The sardines.

In a sardine sandwich.

The spiral took form in the shadows of the kitchen: an illusion of light and dark that slowly began to spin. He shook his head and concentrated on the lettuce. Chop! Chop! The spiral faded, vanished. He relaxed. Pain stung his left thumb and he looked down to see blood welling from the cut.

He put the knife down and stood back, rage boiling within him. And there in the air before the ceiling, darkness began to run together and spin . . .

After lunch he lay on his back, his arms under his head, the curving textured pattern of the bedspread

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pressing into the skin of his bare back. He wouldn't be able to sleep tonight if he slept now. He never could. But he was tired, and there was no use trying to work any more.

He couldn't sleep either.

Eyes open, he saw a faint spiral gather and turn on the white ceiling. Eyes closed, he watched the pattern, dark-on-dark, a pipeline into nothing, reaching down, out, around, dropping as night and evening around his bed. Now he no longer saw the spiral; he sensed it as a familiar concept, a feeling of rotation in his belly and his gonads and his inner ear. It was like an insistant tune, not forgotten even when not remembered, playing silently in the back of his mind. The notes sank, carrying him down; they spun out, around, taking form, gathering in glowing galaxies of stars against the night behind his eyelids.

Was this the feel of insanity?

Growling, he got off the bed. He would face the problem now, by God, and lick it.

Not by answering the ad. Be damned if he gave money to the company which had started this in the first place. Anyway it would take weeks to get an answer. But . . .

Groggy and irritable, he went into the living room, afraid that if he moved too fast the entire room might start to whirl.

He found what he wanted among the magazines and books and half-finished lessons on the sofa. Scissors, he thought. They should be in the bathroom. They weren't. He found them in the kitchen. God alone knew how they had gotten there. Carefully he cut out the picture of the little black-and-white spiral, three and a half inches across. One last snip cut a hole in the center, or as near as he could manage.

Now! He carried the paper to his record player, set it on the turntable and brought a chair over so he could look straight down at it.

This scrap of paper had ruined half his day. Now let it do its worst.

He turned on the record player.

The spoke in the center partially spoiled the illusion, but what was left was powerful. His eyes were held fast, unable even to blink. He wrapped his fingers tightly around the edges of the chair, and continued to look down on—or was it into—the rotating spiral.

He could have licked the real thing, in fact, if he were determined not to be hypnotised. He'd heard too often that nobody could be hypnotised against his will.

And yet . . . it was strange, how he seemed to be drifting through an endless cylindrical space. Now the center of the spiral was whole and complete. He seemed to be looking down into eternity. Really, he ought to be surprised, but he could feel nothing but a vast calm. For a time the calm washed over his mind, and his thoughts became "noise": random and meaningless patterns.

He spun, helpless.

Memory returned slowly and painfully, bit by piece by isolated incident, and surprise became superfluous. It was natural that the spiral had grown at the edges until it was now the entire universe. When,

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except during the self-induced dreams, had the Tunnel been anything else to him?

Before the Revolt, his memory whispered sadly.

Lucifer wriggled his body to move his eye. It jerked in the socket with a grating pain. He had held it fixed on the end of the Tunnel for so long that he'd forgotten how to use the muscles, and the eyelid was dry as silk. Now he could see the tubular wall of the escape proof prison (black and white crystal in four broad endless spiral bands) moving past as he fell. He fell slowly, tugged by the merest trace of gravity, as he had fallen since his surrender at the Revolt's abortive end.

He hadn't believed it at first. But the Tunnel *was* escape proof. Some unseen force kept him back from the wall, and the end to which he was falling did not exist. Though it ran straight as a line, the Tunnel was closed, perhaps in four- or five-space. By using all the magnifying power of his remarkable eye Lucifer could just see himself falling far ahead down the well to infinity.

Yet there was an escape. Behind and ahead the spiral walls seemed to close into a flat, two dimensional image; and as the Tunnel's gentle gravity pulled him along, the spiral turned hypnotically.

He found it easy to induce self-hypnotism.

His last dream hadn't been too bad. It had, in fact, been not only satisfying, but well balanced; had contained not only success, but occasional failure; had held out only immediate pleasure, but the greater pleasures of the future: success, marriage, respect.

What had killed the illusion was the ever present intrusion of reality into the background. Applying his own name to the mythical arch-villain of the universe, making it nearly impossible to identify with his real self, had been deliberately clever. But other items had crept in.

Like the Yin-Yang symbol and the shape of the galaxies, nagging reminders of the Tunnel. Like the barberpole, meeting him on every street, a Tunnel turned inside out. Like the saddened face on the Moon, the round helpless face of that fool Yahweh, who at the last had shown himself neither foolish nor helpless.

The worst flaw in his recent dream had been a slight over-complexity. His plans for the revolution had been similarly flawed. This time the dream would be simpler.

His eye caught the flow of lines down the Tunnel, watched them spread, flattening to a disc that spun out around him, out and over. The lines whirled, white, black, merging to grey, separating. Ghostly radial lines appeared and vanished. The white crystal fragmented into dancing stars. He plunged amid the whirling galaxies of imagination . . .

And opened his eyes, then blinked against the lamplight shining off the yellow paper of his notebook. He had been paying all too little attention to his correspondence course lately. It wasn't like him to let his mind wander so.

Impatiently he got up and began to pace the room, scratching his racially

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Richard E. Peck makes his debut with this story—and it's one which shouldn't have slipped through the fingers of those editors in what we euphemistically call "the higher-paying markets". Nonetheless, their loss is our gain—and we hope to see more of Mr. Peck in these pages, soon . . .

THE MAN WHO FADED AWAY

RICHARD E. PECK

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

ON A FRIDAY MORNING Harry Ferguson decided to stay in bed. That fact, in and of itself, was hardly newsworthy. What makes it worth recording is that Harry Ferguson did precisely that—stayed in bed. Every day for the past three months he had wanted to remain in bed. But never once had he done so. Today was the day. No phone call to the office. No excuses. No mock-cold or fraudulent headache. Harry simply wanted to stay at home. He had realized only the night before that he was fading away.

Walking up the fourteen steps to the brownstone where his furnished room awaited him, Harry had spoken to Mrs. Briggs, his landlady. "Good evening, Mrs. Briggs," he said. She ignored him, uttered not a syllable, unless her constant asthmatic wheezing could be regarded an utterance. Nothing strange about her silence; Mrs. Briggs never spoke to Harry. But on this occasion she extended before her at arm's length a dustmop. She shook it in Harry's face. He sneezed twice and waved a hand before him to clear away the clumps of gray cotton which hovered there. "Why did you . . .?" But Mrs. Briggs had walked back inside. At that instant Harry Ferguson recognized a fact he had long tried to ignore. No one ever saw Harry Ferguson.

Not only was he easy to ignore; he had been that for all his 42 years. But lately, no one had seen him to ignore him. They gazed straight through Harry Ferguson as if he were an insubstantial wraith.

At the office, for instance, there was his supervisor, Mr. Schaeffer. Mr. Schaeffer walked past Harry's desk several times each day. He never said hello. He never even nodded. Harry arrived precisely at 8:58 AM, sat down, opened an envelope that lay on his desk. The envelope was always there. Someone left it before 8:58 AM. Harry removed from the envelope the lists of figures awaiting his attention, spent the day recording the figures on punch cards which he then replaced in the envelope. After Harry left the office at 5:02 PM, someone collected the punch cards, in their envelope, and sent them elsewhere. During each of the days he

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spent in this fashion, no one said a word to Harry Ferguson.

On Friday morning, Harry remained in bed until 10:30 AM. He did not sleep.

Then he arose and made a pot of coffee. He decided to review the evidence. There was no real starting point. In school, teachers had sent notes telling his mother of Harry's cooperation—assignments in on time, never a bit of trouble in deportment. Harry was a model student. He was also the butt of several unpleasant jokes, two of which he could remember. The Barton girl had once said, "Harry? He blends with the wallpaper." And her friend, May Schwartz, had answered, "Ain't that the truth, for God's sake! When Harry comes into the room, you think somebody left." Their laughter was not malicious. They had no intention of hurting Harry Ferguson. They simply did not see him standing there beside them.

Harry grew more aware of his problem when he began to date. Her name was Carolyn Sternbern. Even after their third date, when he ran into her in the park one day and walked over to say hello, she looked blankly at him and said, "Yes?" It made him feel like the Avon lady.

"Harry Ferguson. Remember? We went skating last month."

"Harry? Oh sure. Harry. How are you?" and she wandered off without waiting for an answer. He didn't really mind. He favored the quiet life.

For the first few months at Acme Actuarials he had jotted down the

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random names by which Mr. Schaeffer addressed him. Ferris, twice. Then there was Feeny, and Folsom, Jorgenson and Torgenson. Once Finstermacher. Even Halpern, though Harry could not account for that one. But for the past few months Mr. Schaeffer hadn't said a word. Harry knew in his heart the man meant nothing by it. He simply didn't see Harry sitting there.

Walking to the mirror with his cup of coffee, Harry examined himself. It was not true that he was colorless. He could see that much. He may have looked average, but not everyone had a wave in his thinning, sandy-colored hair. One of Harry's teeth hung crooked—he opened his mouth wider and stared—but probably too far back to be noticed. His eyes were grey, but look there—several freckles. What's-his-name had freckles—Van Johnson—and people remembered him. Harry had once tried to grow a moustache. After no one remarked on it for several weeks he grew tired of trimming it and shaved it off. But no one noticed that either. The pale strip soon faded, or darkened, or whatever the right word was. Then there remained no trace of Harry Ferguson's attempt to escape anonymity.

Harry looked at his watch. Nearly 11:30 AM. By now he should have completed nearly half his daily quota of lists. Perhaps someone would notice when he came around after five to collect the envelope of completed punch cards. And noticing Harry's absence would be almost like noticing his presence, wouldn't it? Harry thought so.

Because he had an hour before he could carry out his plan, he made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and turned on the TV. It was a quiz game. Harry knew most of the answers; no one had ever called him stupid. Maybe that was another part of his problem. If he were stupid, they might get angry with him. But he wasn't. And they didn't.

He had once blamed his parents for the way he was. As if he didn't have enough burdens, then to find himself the only man he knew without a middle name. He had heard a joke in the army. He'd spent two years as a private, permanently awaiting orders. The joke was about a man who had no name, only initials. L.B. Those were the initials. But when they gave him dogtags, they wrote it "Johnson, L(only) B(only)." After that everyone called him Lonely Bonely. But Harry had no middle name. His dogtags read "Ferguson, Harry (nmn)." There was no way to make a joke out of (nmn).

A woman on the TV pointed a finger at him and asked, "Do you have bad breath?" Harry didn't bother to answer. It was obvious she wasn't talking to him. He turned off the TV.

Last night, after Mrs. Briggs had not seen him and the fact of his problem became something he could no longer ignore, Harry went out to test his theory. The idea was ridiculous. No one is really invisible, he told himself. To prove it, he walked two blocks to Shimer's Department Store. On the third floor he found the lingerie counter. No other men anywhere in sight. He waited a full twenty minutes for a saleslady to notice him and ask

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what he wanted. None did.

Harry made one final attempt. He walked into a dressing room at the end of the floor. A saleslady stood with her arms folded while a remarkably-built young woman tried on a kind of bra that came all the way to her waist but had no straps over her shoulders. When she took it off she was no longer remarkably-built. Harry politely removed his hat. First the saleslady looked toward Harry and then looked away. The young woman looked at him but quickly glanced at the saleslady and then shook her head. She grew very pale and several times looked in Harry's direction. But he knew from the way she behaved that—after the first brief glance—she couldn't see him. She tried on another of the long bras. Harry debated speaking to them, but he saw no reason to embarrass anyone. Instead, he walked out and went home.

In the street two cars almost ran him down. One was a cab. The driver failed to scream curses out his open window at Harry. That clinched it. He had faded away.

Now there remained only the project he had devised. He could not prove he was visible. Perhaps he could prove he was not visible.

Harry arrived at the Mercantile Savings Bank too early. Therefore he walked once more around the block. In his pocket he carried the cap pistol Mrs. Briggs' son had left on the stairs. Harry had found it. He meant to return it, directly after he no longer had a use for it.

When the clock outside the bank showed 12:58 PM, Harry went inside. One o'clock should be the busiest time of the day, he had reasoned. Friday. Employers picking up payrolls. Employees cashing payroll checks or drawing out funds for the weekend. Yes, he told himself, the busiest time of the day.

He walked directly to the center one of nine barred windows. He pushed his pistol between the bars toward the girl who stood chewing her gum with unconcerned violence.

"This is a stick-up," he said. He had heard it put that way on the TV. "Give me all your money. Big bills." He hesitated for a moment because the next word troubled him. But Harry was a methodical man. "Sister." On the TV they always called girls "sister."

Her eyes grew round and her mouth hung slack. Harry looked away. He could see the lump of pink gum lying on her tongue, and he didn't want to embarrass her. The girl stared at Harry's cap pistol. Really, Johnny Briggs' cap pistol. Harry was only using it at the moment. She took the brown paper bag he pushed across to her and filled it with bundles of money fastened together with those greyish-blue strips of paper.

Harry said, "Thank you," and started to walk away. He stepped back. "Sister," he said. Then he continued on to the door.

He was nearly half-way there when he heard her start to scream in a surprisingly clear and effective way. Surprising, considering the large lump of gum in her mouth. Almost immediately a loud siren assaulted his ears. Harry began to wonder whether proving his point was really worth all

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the commotion it was causing around him. Half the people ran toward the street, half toward the girl who was screaming. Many of the runners jostled Harry and pushed him to one side. He walked calmly through the confusion and out onto the street where he stopped to watch.

In moments a police car squealed to a stop before the bank. Two officers ran in with drawn guns. Seeing them made Harry remember something. He still held Johnny Briggs' cap pistol in his right hand. He put it inside the bag with the money. He took time to admire the speed with which the police had arrived. Then he walked home.

Saturday's papers spoke of the daring holdup. "Broad daylight" was the phrase they used. Harry laid down the paper for a moment to wonder at that phrase. He could find nothing in his experience to account for the association of "broad" and "daylight." It didn't really matter. He only wondered at the lack of precision in diction. He shrugged and read the rest of the story. The girl described Johnny Briggs' cap pistol in vivid detail. She could not describe Harry, except to say that he looked average. He nodded with some satisfaction—she had seen him, or now thought she had. Then near the end of the column he found what he was looking for. The girl had triggered the bank's automatic cameras with her foot. When developed, the film showed only a smear where Harry had stood. It was over-exposed, or under-exposed. Different accounts disagreed on that point. For Harry's purposes, it didn't really matter. He knew they wouldn't see him.

Monday morning at 10:03 he walked into the precinct station house and surrendered. He handed them the paper bag. It contained nine thousand, four hundred and twelve dollars, *not*—Harry was careful to point out—over ten thousand, as the newspapers had claimed. If there was one thing Harry Ferguson knew, it was figures.

He confessed everything. They put him in a cell with a drunk.

Tuesday morning they came to his cell and took the drunk away. Harry shouted several times before the policeman returned the drunk and took him instead.

Inside the courtroom, Harry only shook his head when a photographer tried to take his picture. But he refused to argue with the man. Who would believe it?

They brought in the girl from the bank. Harry recognized her at once. He told the judge he wanted to plead guilty. The judge asked him to wait, because this was only a preliminary hearing. The girl was asked to point him out. She couldn't. After an Assistant District Attorney whispered in her ear, she looked puzzled a moment. He whispered to her again. This time she nodded and pointed at the bench where Harry sat between two plain-clothes detectives. The judge asked him to stand. Harry did.

The girl said, "No. The other one."

Several people in the courtroom snickered. The plainclothes detective on Harry's right stood up. Harry could tell from the redness around the man's collar that he didn't like it. The Assistant District Attorney whispered

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to the girl again, while the detective stood there and everyone laughed at him.

Harry left. It was not working as he had hoped. He had already missed two full days of work and part of another. It would not do to make Mr. Schaeffer angry with him, if Mr. Schaeffer happened to notice. No one bothered Harry as he walked from the courtroom.

At his desk on the ninth floor of Acme Actuarials, he found three envelopes waiting for him. One from Friday, one from Monday, one from today. Mr. Schaeffer was walking past as Harry sat down to his desk. Harry knew he could not finish three days' work in one afternoon, not if he wanted to do his usual accurate job. He waved at Mr. Schaeffer.

"Mr. Schaeffer?" he called out.

Mr. Schaeffer stopped and looked around with a most puzzled expression on his face.

"Here!" Harry waved his hand again.

Mr. Schaeffer cocked his head toward Harry. It was difficult to tell whether he saw Harry or only looked in his direction. Harry took the chance. "Mr. Schaeffer? I can't finish all this work today."

Mr. Schaeffer waved his hand. "Good work, Feldman." He walked on by into his office.

I tried to tell him, Harry assured himself.

That evening the late editions told of the bank robber's daring escape from Magistrate's Court in "broad daylight." Police were confident they would soon have the man back in custody. They asked all public-spirited citizens to phone in any information on the whereabouts of a man named Harvey Finegold.

Harry Ferguson shook his head. The next time he would spend some of the money before he took the rest back. Perhaps then they'd pay attention. Yes, he would certainly do that.

—Richard E. Peck

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Meet Aleister Houghman—psychic detective! As Ed Bryant, veteran of the Clarion workshop, puts it, "For a long time now the world hasn't seemed ready for a new fantasy story involving a psychic detective and a locked-room case. Probably still isn't . . . "

THE LURKER IN THE LOCKED BEDROOM

ED BRYANT

Illustrated by MICHAEL WM. KALUTA

ALEISTER Houghman, the psychic detective, dourly watched the lightning from behind his library window. The bolts, not quite so vivid as cinematic special effects, contorted among torn clouds while Hollywood cringed below in the valley. There was no light in Houghman's library; the black candles had been extinguished by a draft from the hallway. The ranch-style house quivered precariously on its cantilevered supports.

Houghman leaned forward over the broad polished surface of his Victorian desk. He was a short man. He slouched atop a triple thickness of foam pillows on his chair, passed a pale hand across his forehead and groaned. He felt dyspeptic. Worse, life bored him. A burst of lightning illuminated the sky and the reflected glare cast the fringed silhouette of Houghman's hairy face against the oak bookcase. The display faded and shadows played about the library. In another part of the house a telephone rang.

In half a minute, Wendell ducked below the doorframe of the dim library. "It's for you, boss."

Houghman shook his head painfully, noticed his nose running, snuffled, and picked up the receiver. "Yeah?"

The voice on the telephone line was high-pitched and female, apparently on the edge of hysteria. Houghman felt first distracted, then irritated. He grasped the receiver by the neck and banged the mouthpiece down hard on the desk three times. The whining of the voice on the line ceased.

"Okay," said Houghman to the telephone. "Rap. Just stay cool." He drew an index finger across the constant drip below his septum and wiped it on a leg of his paisley bell-bottoms.

Intermittently interrupted by electronic crackles, the voice subsided after five minutes to sobs.

"Hey, cool it," said the psychic detective. "I got the scene; okay, it's a real bummer. But how about if I wait

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until morning?"

The voice shrilled an octave higher.

"Okay," Houghman said, his voice cracking briefly as a tendril of phlegm tickled down his throat. "I'll be right over—another half-hour, maybe."

The caller offered thanks.

"Ciao." Houghman dropped the receiver into the cradle from a height of two feet and watched the horizontal sheets of rain spatter against the window.

"New job, boss?" Wendell loomed in the doorway. He was the swarthy giant Houghman once rescued in the jungles of Yucatan. Wendell flipped the light switch and Houghman blinked at the brightness.

"You grokked it. Get the bug out of the garage."

Wendell left to prepare the modified Volkswagen while his employer stood before a baroque mirror to brush his beard. The thick black hair was matted and resisted the ordered stroke of the brush. Houghman grimaced painfully, gave up and turned to adjust his amber peace beads instead. They did not go with the patterns dyed on his cured yak-skin vest, but the detective didn't notice. He yawned.

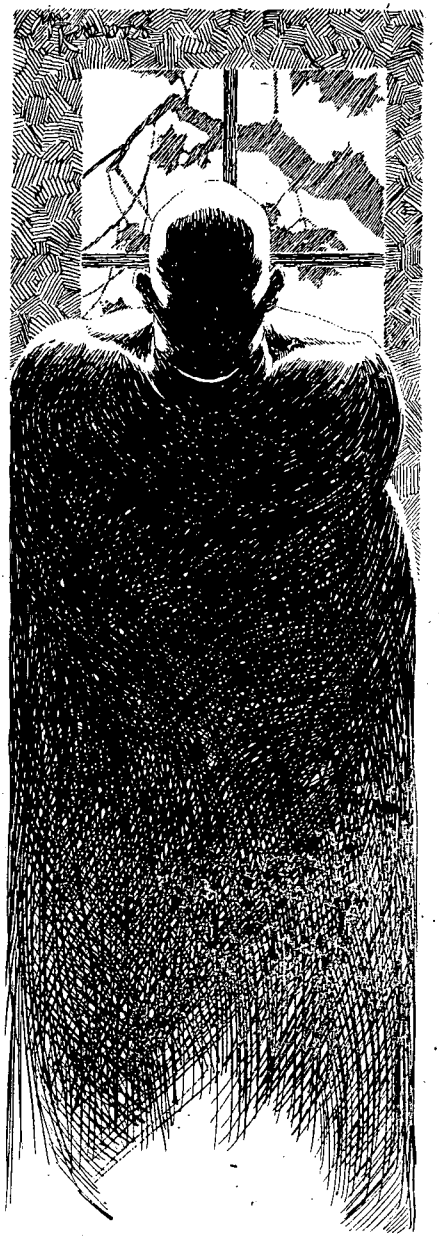
Houghman was still inspecting himself critically when Wendell reappeared in the doorway.

"The bug's ready, boss."

"Good; don't forget my equipment bag."

Wendell easily lifted the heavy black satchel and the two men walked to the front door. From behind them came the padding footsteps of a large animal.

"You too, Moonfleet," said Houghman. "We can maybe use you."



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Moonfleet materialized out of the shadows at the kitchen door. The dim light lent him a vaguely sinister cast. Moonfleet was a large, completely black Hungarian puli. He had worked with Houghman for more than five years, ever since as a puppy he was rescued by his present master from the Los Angeles Municipal Pound. Moonfleet rubbed up against Houghman's hip and whined. The detective affectionately rumpled the dog behind the ears. Moonfleet slobbered on Houghman's paisley trousers.

Wendell opened the front door and rain sleeted onto the hall carpet. "I wouldn't send a dog out on a night like this," said Houghman. "How come we gotta go?" Wendell and the dog looked at each other, but neither made any comment. Houghman opened the door of the VW for Moonfleet and the bulky puli climbed into the rear seat. Houghman settled himself in front, not bothering with the seatbelt, and Wendell got in the driver's side. With a muted roar, the modified Porsche engine pushed the Volkswagen down the twisting road to the valley.

The Swithit Hotel for Young Ladies was located on Hazeltine Avenue in Van Nuys. Wendell had some difficulty finding the address because of the rain. Finally Hazeltine was located and the rest-rotted VW pulled up by the Swithit. The hotel was a Mondrianesque orange crate, no different from dozens of others in the neighborhood. Immediately inside the lobby was a brass nameplate labeled "Harriet Mandible, Manager."

Harriet was a tall woman, angularly constructed with no breasts and a long, triangular face. To Houghman, oppressed as he felt, she resembled a praying mantis, dressed all in black. Her height disturbed him.

"It's so good of you to come," she said as Houghman, Wendell, and Moonfleet dripped rain water onto the yellow indoor-outdoor carpet. "I realize that two hours past midnight is an unfortunate time to disturb you. But I was so upset about tonight's incident, I just couldn't wait until morning."

"Right," said Houghman. "But lady, what I don't dig is how come your niece referred you to me and why you haven't called in the heat. I mean, like rape's a pretty bad scene."

A furtive look crossed Harriet Mandible's sharp features. "It's rather—ah, a matter of discretion. We of the Swithit would find it quite distressing if this hotel became the object of vulgar speculation and discussion, particularly in the local tabloids. Too, none of the girls involved have seen fit to pursue the issue."

"Girls?" The psychic detective blinked. "Plural? Maybe you haven't leveled, lady. Just how many rapes have you had?"

Miss Mandible blushed in ears and cheeks. "Well, including tonight we have had three ra—ah, assaults."

In the tastefully subdued atmosphere of Harriet's office, the number seemed especially monstrous. Even stolid Wendell was taken aback.

Houghman assumed a skeptical expression. "Three, hmm. I can't see three chicks getting banged and no one

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putting up a fuss."

Harriet Mandible's blush spread from her cheeks down to the point of her long chin. "We accept only very well-bred, genteel young ladies in this establishment, Mr. Houghman. All understand the value of discretion and none wish the distasteful focus of publicity."

"So where are the three birds now?"

"They have all returned to their respective homes; two in Illinois, the other in Oklahoma. The Swithit's contingency fund was used to help defray their expenses."

"And a good deal more besides, I'd guess," Wendell muttered darkly. His employer motioned him to silence.

"So," Houghman said, "even the chick that got it tonight's split for home?"

"She has gone," confirmed Harriet. "She could not bear to remain where the unfortunate experience had occurred."

"Right." Houghman extracted a leather-bound notebook from an inside pocket. "What's the date, Wendell?"

"September tenth."

Houghman made a notation. "When were the other incidents?"

Harriet reflected for a long moment. "One, I believe was August twelfth. The other—let's see—I think it was about July fifteenth. Yes, that was it—the fifteenth."

The psychic detective performed complex mental calculations. "Then the three rapes happened just four weeks apart. Twenty-eight days, hmm."

Wendell's face brightened with revelation. "Boss," he said, "you don't suppose this cycle thing means the rapist is some sort of freako pervert?"

"Could be. Can't tell without checking with the girls themselves."

Harriet looked mystified; then comprehending, she blushed again.

"But there are other possibilities," mused Houghman. On cue, the storm clouds over Van Nuys thinned sufficiently for the moon to shine through. The small group in Harriet's office turned toward the window. The moon was full. "I might have known," Houghman said. He jotted another note. Then he absently wiped his nose with the sleeve of his flowered shirt, tilted his face up at Harriet and said, "I'd like to get a look at the rooms where the chicks were raped."

"Oh." said Harriet. "All the assaults occurred in just one room." She led the group out of her office and into a chromed elevator. The car stopped at the fourth floor. The hallway was uncarpeted, dimly illuminated by bare bulbs and the walls were mottled with crumbling plaster.

Room 491. The door was unlocked and the Swithit manager led the detective and his party in. It was sparsely decorated; there was no carpet, no shade on the overhead light, no pictures on the yellowed wall. There were several mirrors, two on the walls and a larger one fixed to the ceiling over the bed. The bed, in contrast to the other furniture, was obviously new. The head- and foot-boards were shiny walnut overlaid on pine. The covers were neatly made up. The only other furnishings were an aging vanity table leaning toward the door, a beige metal dresser, and a hard-backed chair.

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"Hard to tell there was a rape," said Houghman, leaning over the double bed.

"That is one of the strangest things about all this," said Harriet. "None of the girls apparently were attacked in bed. They told me they were awakened from a sound slumber as their attacker slammed them violently down upon the floor. Two even had splinters in their back."

"A freako," muttered Wendell.

"The most remarkable thing," said Harriet Mandible, "is the problem of how the rapist entered the room at all." She gestured toward the door. There was a latch, a safety chain, and two bolt-type locks. "The girls used all the locks conscientiously, particularly after the incident with Lucy in July. In fact when we heard Sandra screaming last night we could not get in because of the locks. We could only wait until her attacker had escaped and she could open the door from the inside."

Houghman stood on a chair to examine the glass transom. It was locked. "Did she see the guy?"

"No, it was completely dark with the curtains drawn. Sandra said that she couldn't see the man at all, nor did he say a single word. He just breathed hard—she remembered that."

Houghman stepped from the chair, crossed to the room's only window and drew back the curtains. The pane was secured with two locks.

"The old locked room bit," he sighed. "Well, Miss Mandible, you probably did right in calling me. As your niece possibly mentioned, my thing is picking up on para-natural forces. This case probably is just that heavy. How about it, Moonfleet?"

The shaggy black puli snuffled around the room, began to whine, then barked meaningfully at his master. Houghman wrote notes. Harriet and Wendell watched with interest as the psychic detective picked up dust specimens from the baseboard and window sill, scrapings from the surfaces of the furniture, and snippets of material from the bed covers and curtains. All the materials were put into vials proferred by Wendell from Houghman's black equipment bag.

"Well, that should do it," said Houghman. "We'll be back October seventh. Until then, just keep loose. Stay cool."

Harriet Mandible was aghast. "What? You're not going to do anything for a month?"

Houghman raised his hand soothingly. "I have a theory. Just calm all your girls; nothing should happen during the next four weeks. I'll be back before there's any trouble. There will, however, be tests I'll have to perform the next few weeks. Costly analyses," he said meaningfully.

"Certainly," said Harriet. "Our contingency fund will cover your fee and expenses." They haggled for a minute and then reached a figure.

"See you, kid," said Houghman. He turned to the door. "Oh, by the way, you people do anything to the room during the early part of July? Redecorate or anything like that?"

The Swithit manager considered. "Yes, I believe we did. The first week in July, we replaced most of the furniture on the fourth floor."

Wendell held the hotel door open for

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Houghman and Moonfleet. "So long," Houghman said.

"But are you sure—" Harriet was still somewhat unconvinced.

"No sweat," Houghman assured her. "Just you and your girls cool it for a few weeks." He got into the car, leaving Harriet Mandible on the steps of the Swithit Hotel for Young Ladies.

As the VW roared away, Wendell said, "Golly, boss, this case looks like a tough one. I never could outguess those locked room mystery novels."

Houghman inclined his head in token modesty. "Simple deduction will do it, Wendell."

The spectral echo of the Porsche engine faded into the California sunrise.

The night of October seventh was more placid than the storm of four weeks previous. The full moon was properly gibbous as dark and foreboding clouds scudded by. The time approached midnight.

A certain air of tension pervaded the Swithit Hotel for Young Ladies. The focus of the bad vibrations was Room 491. The room was occupied by Aleister Houghman. He sat in the room's lone chair with his back to the locked and bolted door. To his right was the bed, the dresser was to the left and in front was the window. The curtains were drawn, but the fuzzy glow of the full moon was distinguishable through the dark fabric. A single small candle burned on the floor beside the chair.

On the other side of the door stood Harriet Mandible and Wendell. The latter nervously zipped and unzipped the black equipment bag. Harriet tried to avoid picking up shed hairs from Moonfleet, who was whining anxiously as he padded about the hall.

Inside 491, Houghman glanced at the luminous dial of his watch. He got up from the chair and turned to the door to recheck the locks.

There was a sound behind him and Houghman pivoted. The bed snarled at him. The growl came from deep within the bed's double inner-spring mattress. Houghman stood very still, watching in fascination as the angular lines of the bed mutated grotesquely and became something other than the bed.

"Wendell, now!"

Broken glass sprayed from above the door as Wendell hurled an object through the transom. Houghman caught the shotgun clumsily and saw the bed-thing crouch low in its frame and spring.

Houghman threw himself desperately to the side and caromed off the vanity table which collapsed into splintered wreckage. The bed-creature, still metamorphosing, was unable to turn sharply and smashed into the door.

The psychic detective fumbled with his weapon as his mysterious adversary, becoming more anthropomorphic by the second, prepared for another pounce.

The creature leapt from the shadows by the door as Houghman raised the sawed-off shotgun. A brilliant flash illuminated the room and a double explosion reverberated. Houghman was bowled over by the shadowy mass. The echoes died and Houghman got

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 126)

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War of Human Cats

By FESTUS PRAGNELL

A Fantastic Classic

America was helpless before this amazing invasion of cats in human form. Who were they, and what was the Master's purpose?

"HAVE you anything to say before I have you shot?" the Master asked me.

He did not shout, emotionless nend that he was. His voice was a horrible, squeaky falsetto. He seemed bored, as though having me murdered was nothing more than the removing of an insect.

My guards, who had bound my arms with such a ridiculously unnecessary number of biting strands of thin cord, stood around in listless, slouching attitudes, some of them with cigarets dangling from their lips. Many hundreds they must have seen being treated as I was being treated since unexpected civil war had leaped upon the U. S. A. like a tiger. How well, how secretly, they had laid their plans!

"No," I said in reply.

It was useless to argue. I was doomed to die for the crime of defending my country. "Resisting the liberators of America" was what the rebels called it. Useless to deny the charge. My voice sounded normal as though I did not care.

And, in fact, I was beyond caring. I had been through so much since the amazing night attack in which men around me had been shot while they slept and I knocked on the head as I tried to jump to my feet. And we had thought ourselves to be fifty miles behind the front line!

After the dark cell, the miserable food, and the biting cords, what cared I if they killed me? Let them get the deed done! I loathed them for their indifference, their boredom, their dirt and their slovenliness.

The Master, a slim, dry, gray-haired man with a quirk of amusement to his mouth, jerked his thumb in a significant downward gesture. It was too much trouble for him to speak. A jerk of the thumb would do.

A guard pulled one of the cords that bound me as a farm hand might jerk on the tethering rope of a cow. He swung me around, nearly throwing me to the floor. As this happened, my face was close to his and I looked into his eyes.

It was the first time I had had a close-up view of one of my captors. Previously I had always been in the dark. Even now I had been in daylight such a little while that I was still somewhat dazzled.

Something peculiar, something unhuman about these men had been puzzling me. Something of which their silence, their dull, stupid faces, their laziness and their stealthy, springy walk were all a part.

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That man's eyes were not human eyes. They were more like the eyes of a cat. There were no irises, the pupils were vertical slits and the whites were a yellowish green. With superstitious fear I turned my head to see the eyes of the other rebels.

Their eyes were the same. Vertical black slits of pupils stared out of each pair of sockets. Desperately I swung my head.

Every man in that dingy room, that room with its inverted mockery of justice, had those same feline eyes with the vertical slits.

That, I think, was the first time that I was really frightened. The superstitions of my progenitors rose in me. They swept over me, terrifying. Death I had faced without a tremor, but this was something utterly outside normal human experience. Was I in the grip of devils, of ghosts, of werewolves or of vampires? Or of what?

In my spasm of sheer terror I think I must have made strange noises. I saw the next prisoner, trussed as I was, turn to me, alarmed. But those human cats (I can think of no other way of describing them) took no notice.

"Who are you?" I screamed. "You are not men. Tell me! Who are you?"

The human cats did not even turn their heads. It was, I suppose, only the thousandth repetition of the same boring scene to them, the dawning realizations of a man being taken away to die.

Another hand jerked impatiently on my ropes. I almost expected to see claws on it. Then, with oddly silent steps and without a word, they hustled me down a corridor.

I WAS taken into a large hall that, in peaceful times, had been used for dancing. Chairs and small tables were stacked at the end of the room. In the middle of the polished floor was an enameled table with many large bottles, knives, hypodermic needles and other instruments of surgery.

On one side of this hall sat or lay many men and some women and even children. Some of the men were in khaki, as I was, and others in civilian clothes. All had their arms bound as mine were bound, and all watched the man at the table in fascinated horror.

On the other side of the hall, beyond the table, lay many more figures, but these were rigid and motionless, their arms no longer bound.

I saw men and women lifted onto the enameled table one by one. The man in white bent over them, seemed to be injecting something into their necks. Violent contortions and gurgling cries followed, then the victim was still and was wheeled away to take his or her place among the rows and rows of still forms.

"What is this?" I asked.

"We do not use bullets," a human cat told me, tonelessly. "Your shot will be a shot of poison. The master's rage is terrible."

I was dumped with the others.

The human cats kept on with their horrible work of slaughter in silence. Their faces were blank, except for the executioner himself, who smiled happily.

Around me the future victims of the needle were mostly still and silent. I noticed that anybody who made a noise, weeping, sobbing or begging for mercy, was certain to be next for the table.

Victims were carried to the table on silent, automatic trucks. On the same truck each body was carried away. As one victim lay on the table the next would be waiting beside it, ready to be lifted up in his or her turn.

And I, like those around me, sat still,

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watching, trying not to breathe lest the noise attract the automatic truck in my direction. Desperately, I clung to life for the last few possible minutes.

I saw my comrades, captured like myself in the night attack, go to the table. I saw men's nerves give way, and heard them scream abuse at the human cats. The rebels took no notice except to see that the needle ended the noise at the next opportunity.

In a desperate, sweating fear I lay, my heart leaping or stopping at every move of the trucks. After many minutes there was a pause as the white-clad, smiling executioner opened a new bottle. Soon after that a change came over me. This suspense was worse than death itself. I wanted to end it, quickly.

I began to shout, violent foolish abuse, using every objectionable term I could think of. I told the human cats to end my existence as soon as possible so that I would not see their loathesome forms about me any more.

I saw the man, or the two-legged cat, in white look in my direction.

"Stop that noise!" I heard him say.

As I was lifted onto the truck and strapped down I stopped shouting.. I was wheeled to the table, placed on it.

THE human cat looked at me with a peculiar smile.

"Impatient?" he asked. Apart from his eyes he looked human.

"I was," I said, feeling that perhaps I had been hasty.

He nodded, with another grin.

"What is your name?"

"James Montgomery."

"The life of James Montgomery is over," he said, producing a filled needle that an assistant had handed him below my line of vision. "To James Montgomery comes the sweet oblivion of death, wiping out all things for ever and ever." His voice now had a sing-song, droning quality.

"The Master's rage is terrible," he added, as though whispering a secret.

I felt the point of the needle.

"So nice of you to keep still," he said. "It makes it easier to inject the poison in exactly the right place. Much more economical with the chemicals, too."

I was being murdered with the finest feline courtesy and grace. Presently I would, no doubt, be just so much butcher's meat to them. Why was I submitting so tamely? I tensed my muscles for a last struggle. I tried to raise my bound ankles to kick out with both legs together.

But the shot had gone home. Like fire it plunged into my flesh, searing, burning. The dose of venom seemed like a red-hot sword the size of a man's arm.

In my pain I looked again at the man in the white overalls. He was grinning pleasantly. A sparkle of sheer enjoyment was in his catlike eyes under his few strands of white hair. My agony amused him.

I writhed. My brain seemed to twist in knots.

All this was the direct effect of the poison on my nerves. But soon the poisoned blood reached the brain. It was like a great black wall. A rushing flood of nearing unconsciousness, swamping, engulfing. It was as though I had plunged suddenly below the surface of a mighty river of darkness, and of silence.

Lights abruptly became dim. Sounds faded. My pain did not so much end as seem to go a long way away.

I felt hands seize me, lift me down. I wanted to speak, to say, "I am not dead yet," but my head and lips seemed to weigh tons. I could not move them. And, anyway, what did it matter?

I listened to a pounding, rushing

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river. It was my own blood coursing through my veins. As long as that river poured on I was still alive. When it stopped I would be dead.

That is the last thing that I remember—listening to the circulation of my own blood within my ears, and marveling that it was still so strong.

I DID not die. The river poured on, never faltering. For months, it seemed to me, I listened to it.

But James Montgomery was gone. I forgot who he was and all about him. I seemed to be an unborn child, life yet unopened before me. The rushing stream seemed to be the maternal blood stream.

At last I opened my eyes. It seemed a tremendous experiment, the opening of my eyes. It was as something I had never tried before, and the consequences might be terrible. My eyes met —light. I wondered what it was. I had never seen light before.

Shapes moved about. One came and put food in my mouth. It was good, but it was a long time before I understood what I was intended to do with it.

Then I was shoved into a sitting position. A shape lay in the rough bed next to mine. I realized that he was another creature like myself.

After a long while I said to him, "Goo-goo!" And thought how awfully clever I was.

He thought hard and long, then replied with, "Gug-gug!"

We both laughed and thought how clever we were. For a long while we eyed each other, sucking our thumbs.

A man in uniform passed along the beds.

"I don't understand," he said to the man who seemed to have charge of me, "C. T. 72603, then C. T. 72613, then C. T. 72676. Why the big gaps? The Master's rage is terrible."

"There was a mistake," the male nurse said. "One bottle of serum was much overstrength. Of one whole batch only 72613 survived." He pointed at me.

"Bad," said the officer, shaking his head. "We reckon on a survival rate of at least three out of four. Somebody will lose his head over this when the Master hears."

"The Master's rage is terrible," said the male nurse, droningly, as though repeating a set lesson.

And though the words they spoke were meaningless to me I somehow knew that they were about me, and I remembered them so well that later, as I learned to speak, I could still repeat them. But still I did not understand. For, in that queer second childhood of mine, all recollection of James Montgomery, colonel in the army of America, and of his supposed execution had gone.

It seemed quite natural that everybody around me should have the eyes of cats, with narrow slits of pupils in daylight that expanded in darkness so that they could see their way about with ease when there was not enough light for normal eyes to detect at all. With my human eyes I felt inferior, but my eyes were changing. They were becoming the same as the eyes of the others around me.

There was no artificial light that I noticed in the barracks. Where electric light was fitted the globes had been taken away. Everybody could see quite well in the dark.

"GET up! Get up! The Master calls! There is great work for you to do. We must all serve the Master. The Master's rage is terrible. He punishes those who do not obey him. He destroys those who do not work for him. In the Master's service there is much

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to be done, and much danger. Arise, follow the Captain, and learn your tasks."

I think it must have been a loudspeaker that uttered the words. I felt strangely stirred, and like all those around me I followed the Captain without question.

Then, in a big house, we all learned to handle rifles, machine-guns, autos, tanks, airplanes or big guns. We learned with amazing speed, for our muscles were already accustomed to the tasks, although our brains had forgotten them. All the while the loudspeakers were blaring with great insistence into our ears.

"Yours is a great, a high destiny. You are to fight for the Master. It is a glorious task. The Master's enemies are strong and numerous, but you will find that you have one great advantage over them. You can see in the dark. They cannot.

"Therefore you can attack them at night, by starlight and moonlight, when there is insufficient light for them to see, but enough for you. Then you can walk up close to them, unheard and unseen, and shoot them down with your silent guns. You will find that you can aim at them point blank while you are still invisible to them. You can bring down their airplanes if they fly by night, or bomb their airdromes and destroy their lines of communication at night without the least fear of retaliation.

"This marvelous power the Master has given you to aid you in doing his work. But remember! Do not kill for the sake of killing. Whenever you can, take prisoners. For every prisoner you take will become a soldier of the Master. Remember that. One prisoner taken alive is as good as four of the enemy killed. The Master's rage is terrible."

And so forth, endlessly. We believed it all without question.

In time I found that I was somehow different from the others. They could see in the dark, but I could see better. They walked with a catlike stealthiness, but I was more silent than they. For this I was much praised, and made a Captain. My nails changed somewhat, becoming thicker and pointed as though they were turning into claws. A strange urge came upon me to creep abroad at night and pounce upon small animals.

Two things were forbidden under the strictest penalties in the settlement. One was "Prowling alone by night," and the other was "Climbing." But my urge was strong. I prowled, and I seized and killed a small dog. It was a great thrill to me.

Next day there was a terrific uproar. The manner in which I had mangled the dog's body with my developing claws seemed to prove that one of the Master's men had done it. It was regarded as a terrible crime. But with feline cunning I had hidden my tracks, climbing across the roof back to my room, and I faced all questions with a perfectly blank face. I was not found out and I breathed easier.

After that I controlled my strange urges. They roused the Master's wrath, and that meant death. But I still wanted to creep abroad at night, to prowl over roofs, to seize upon and to devour small living things. It was an urge I had to thrust down.

THE date of my capture was the 13th of May, 1948. On the 29th of May I was a fully-rated Captain in the army of the human cats, under the Master. The time seemed much longer to me. Colonel James Montgomery of the American Army existed no longer. In his place was C. T. 72613, rebel and

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Captain in the army of the revolting Master.*

"You are to be a spy," I was told one day. "Our great need now is for transport; autos and trucks to carry men and supplies from point to point of our enormous and rapidly advancing front.

"Take these dark glasses. You will be landed by airplane behind the enemy lines. Your job is to capture an auto, or, if you can, a truck, and drive it back here. If you can capture one or more prisoners as well so much the better. The Master's rage is terrible."

"The Master's rage is terrible," I replied, saluting.

The airplane landed me on a dark field. There was less than a half moon, but I could see well. The place was oddly familiar, like meeting in real life somebody one has dreamed about.

"The Master's rage is terrible," said the pilot, as he took leave of me.

I was alone and strangely happy. The night was pleasantly cool, and for me it was not dark. It smelled damp, and the leaf-mould scent of woods spoke of rabbits and pheasants to be caught. I was a creature of the night. Let me forget the Master for a while and enjoy myself. I flexed my developing talons.

Swiftly, silently, I glided into the woods. But though I saw several rabbits and pheasants I caught none. My legs were still human legs. I had nothing yet to be compared with the agility of a real cat. Wild creatures avoided my clumsy springs, my reaching hands, with ease.

I was bitterly disappointed with myself. I had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. I could not catch rabbits with my hands.

A dog barked at the slight noise I made. I scrambled over a wall and found myself in an orchard. The dog sprang at me, but I picked up a heavy stick and swung it, crushing the dog's skull.

Then I was happier. I had killed. I was a beast of prey.

I dropped on my knees and tried to eat that dog. I got a mouthful of hair. Horrible. I cut off a lump of him with my knife. Not much better.

Instead, I ate apples from the trees. My instincts were to devour my kill, but the apples tasted better.

And as I ate I was thinking:

"Somewhen, sometime, I have been here before. I have climbed these same trees and eaten the apples. How else did I know with such certainty which tree held the sweetest fruit?"

Beyond the trees, to the right, was a

* By June 1st of 1948, Bates' *History of The Feline War* tells us the uprising of the human cats, beginning in Arizona, had swept clear to the Pacific seaboard and was rolling across the great plains toward Chicago. Three-fourths of the U. S. A. was under the mysterious Master whose name was unknown and who allied all the usual cunning of dictatorship with a new and ghastly science.

His armies swelled in amazing manner while those of the government melted. His devotees forgot their past, becoming his blind, fanatical servants. Everywhere in the still unconquered territory were cells of spies who wore dark glasses by day to hide their eyes and went out by night to organize sabotage and dope important persons.

Many an army officer disappeared for two weeks, then returned with a plausible tale; a spy of the Master. In these cases a different serum must have been used, for the eyes did not change.

Always the rebels did their fighting by night. For then it was a case of men who could see, fighting those who could not. Division after division of men was surprised in camp, and most of the prisoners forced to become slaves of the Master, fighting their former comrades.

It was suicide for a government plane to fly by night. Out of the darkness would come a hail of bullets from a plane that could be heard but not seen. Blackouts were useless against men with the eyes of cats. Vital centers were bombed, railroads, munition works, ammunition dumps, soldiers in training. As soon as night fell the human cats ruled the sky, bombing where they chose. Nothing did the human cats fear but searchlights, and the whole of the U. S. A. did not contain two per cent of the searchlights needed. Bombing airplanes put out those there were, and then the army of the human cats swept forward, their eyes faintly visible in the darkness, glowing green.—Ed.

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house. I knew exactly what that house looked like, with its lawns, its tennis courts, its swimming pool. In my dreams I had known it. I would go and see whether my dreams had been right.

I passed through cedar, rhododendron, pampas grass, as I had known I would. I heard the harsh scream of a peacock, but it no longer stimulated my hunting instincts. The house was just as I had known it would be.

That made things easy. On the right of the house was a garage containing a large and powerful auto. I would steal that. The Major would be pleased when I got back so soon and so successfully.

The garage doors were locked, but I forced them open, using a plank as a crowbar. It made rather a noise. I waited and listened, but all seemed still.

I went in. The car was there.

I heard someone approaching. A man in pajamas and slippers was coming along the path. No doubt the noise had roused him, and he was coming to see if anything was wrong. If he had carried a torch I would have shot him, for I feared light, which destroyed my advantage over normal men. But his hands were empty.

THE man came into the garage.

"You are my prisoner," I said, covering him.

I saw the blood drain from his face and his mouth drop open.

"Jim!" he muttered, faintly. "That was Jim's voice!"

Again that sense of queer familiarity came over me. I fought it down.

"I am a soldier of the Master," I said. "I need your car. And I need you."

"I can't see you," he said.

"I can see you," I answered. "That is sufficient. Get into the car and keep still while I start it up. If you make any trouble I shall shoot."

"You can't start this car," he said.

"Why not?"

"It is out of order. New laws. All cars when not in use have to be locked so that only the authorized driver can start them. So many cars have been stolen by the rebels."

I thought quickly.

"Then start the car up yourself. I shall be covering you."

He moved to the electric light switch.

"Let that switch alone," I ordered.

"How can I start up the car if I can't see?"

I had not thought of that.

He began to talk, rapidly, eagerly.

"There are thick curtains to cover the windows. Not a chink of light would show out. Air raid precautions."

"Very well then."

He covered the windows and turned on the light, looking full at me.

"Jim!" he cried. "It *is* you. We thought you were dead. I thought that you were a ghost, and that you would vanish when I put the light on."

"I know nothing of your Jim," I said. "I am a soldier of the Master. Get this car started."

"Don't you know me?" he asked, in a sort of puzzled despair. "I'm Peter, your brother." Then he must have caught sight of my eyes, for he gasped. "Jim—those eyes. . . ."

A deep misery and horror were in his eyes and voice. Somehow, it made my flesh creep.

Something was here that I did not understand.

"Will you get the car started?" I asked, sternly.

Slowly he moved to the front of the car. The engine began to throb.

"Is that noise necessary?" I asked.

"I can't help it, Jim."

"Don't call me Jim."

The car made little noise, really, but

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there was a chance that somebody might be roused. I posted myself at a window where I could watch for anybody leaving the house. My hand was near the switch. One touch, and I would be back in my friendly, covering darkness, seeing but unseen. Then, all normal men would be at the mercy of my silent revolver.

The garage filled with fumes.

Peter, as he called himself, had opened the bonnet of the car and was bending over the engine. The double door was slightly ajar behind him, letting a thin sliver of light across the lawn. My head was strangely dizzy.

"How much longer will you be?" I asked. My voice sounded thick.

"Not long," he said, anxiously. "The car has been out of use for some time. Gasoline shortage. Things have got corroded."

Things began to swim around me. I saw Peter's face, quite close, anxious and peering at me. I tried to raise my revolver, but his hand closed over it, taking it away.

Then I fell, but he caught me.

Vaguely I remember him putting his arms around me and dragging me out of the garage. After that all was blank.

WHEN I awoke I was seated in the back of the auto, which was bowling along the road. Peter and another man were in front. My wrists were bound, but not uncomfortably. My head ached fit to split. The realization that I had failed swept over me. I shivered in terror at the thought of the rage of the Master when he heard of my failure.

"What are you doing with me?" I blustered.

Peter looked around.

"Sorry, Jim. I had to do it. I deliberately let the engine run in a closed garage, filling the air with carbon-monoxide fumes.* I kept near the doors and avoided the worst. You must feel pretty bad, Jim."

"Don't call me Jim," I said weakly.

"But you *are* Jim," he insisted. "A dozen little marks, scars and moles prove it. Do you think I don't know the little brother who shared my cot with me, played soldiers with me?"

"You are James Montgomery all right," the other man said. "The chances are millions to one against such a perfect resemblance, and one look at your teeth puts the matter beyond all doubt. The marks of decay here and there, the fillings, all are identical with the teeth of James Montgomery."

"Are not my teeth longer, more pointed?" I asked.

"How did you know that?"

I saw that I had made a mistake.

"Something strange has happened to you," the man said. "We mean to find out what it is."

I felt unpleasantly helpless. What these men talked of I could not understand. All I had been taught was what was necessary to make me a soldier of the Master. Beyond that I was as a new-born babe. My brain was in darkness save for one spot. And I was horribly afraid; afraid of the unknown, but still more afraid of the Master. Where these men were taking me I did not know, but wherever it was I was certain that the Master would find me.

* Carbon monoxide gas is poisonous. It combines with the hæmoglobin of the blood just as oxygen does, forming a stable compound and thus preventing the oxygen in the lungs from reaching the tissues. Unconsciousness follows.

A molecule of carbon monoxide consists of one atom of carbon and one of oxygen. It has two free valency bonds, and is thus so similar to oxygen that the hæmoglobin of the blood is deceived, discovering the mistake only when it tries to give up the supposed oxygen but cannot. One more atom of oxygen turns carbon monoxide into carbon dioxide, which is inert and harmless. Many people have been killed by carbon monoxide fumes given off by auto engines.—Ed.

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When the car stopped and I was taken out I struggled, although my arms were bound. My legs, I found, were remarkably strong.

Peter became annoyed.

"Now, Jim, are you going to persist in being foolish? If you do you will be put into a strait-jacket. You can't get away from here. They know all about your strength and your power of seeing in the dark. All they want and all I want is to secure your own welfare. Can't you see that? I am not your enemy, I am your oldest friend in the world, your own flesh and blood."

I spat at him, but I quieted down. I did not know what a strait-jacket was, and the word frightened me.

IN that house, which was, of course, what is termed a mental hospital in polite circles, I was given a room. Peter's and my own money and influence kept me out of the ordinary prison camps.

My room was comfortable. In fact, it was padded all over. But the door was of metal with heavy bolts. And the window was three stories up, looking out over a countryside with woods and fields.

Through that window I would gaze at night and my old longing would well up in me to prowl under the moon, stalking and chasing rabbits and birds. With a little more practice, I was certain, I could catch the rabbits. My legs were getting stronger and more springy every day.

Many men came to see me. There were men in the uniforms of army Generals, men whom I know now to have been prominent politicians in the government that had its back to the wall. Other men stuck needles into me and examined me.

They discussed things in front of me as though I was not there. The men who stuck needles into me were particularly interested in the patch of soft hair spreading over my chest, the larger patch on my back, and in my fingers and toe nails.

"The case of your brother, Mr. Montgomery," they said, "while incomprehensible, is by no means unusual. Unfortunately, there are thousands of such cases. Nearly every rebel prisoner we take we find to have been formerly a government soldier. They are not traitors, but they have lost their memories and do not know what they are doing. And their eyes have changed, which gives them the uncanny power of seeing in the dark. The hair on your brother's chest, Mr. Montgomery, is a close imitation of the fur of a cat. And his nails are slowly turning into a cat's claws."

Peter groaned.

"Do you tell me that my brother is turning into a cat?"

"Yes, that is exactly what is happening."

"How far will the process go?" Peter asked, hoarsely.

"Who can tell? It may stop, or it may go on, until—until it is complete."

"Complete!" gasped Peter, realizing what this word meant. "Then my brother would be a huge cat, a tiger!"

"Calm yourself. The chances are that it will prove impossible for that to happen."

"But what makes him *like* it?"

"Ah, Mr. Montgomery! What wouldn't we give to know! Then we would have a chance of getting even with this monster who calls himself the Master and who is making this weird change in so many brave men. We could turn all our prisoners into loyal soldiers once more, and they would have the power of seeing in the dark still, which would make them the equals of the Master's dupes. If only we

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could cure it.

"All we can say as yet is that there are strange substances in your brother's blood. Complicated substances that defy our powers of analysis. As a guess I should say that a large quantity of hormones from the thyroid glands of a cat have been injected into your brother's veins.

"But cheer up. While there's life there's hope, you know. The human system may yet prove capable of throwing off these foreign substances."

He grinned an elfin grin. He meant it to be reassuring, but to Peter it seemed to be a mockery of his fears.

"Do you mean that unless that happens we can do nothing about it?"

"We mean to try everything we can think of," the other said, not sounding very hopeful.

Peter groaned again.

WEEKS passed. My system showed no sign of throwing off the alien substances. Instead the patches of hair on my chest and back grew larger and my claws developed. I found it intolerable to wear clothes, and spent all my time naked. And more and more I wanted to run loose, to stalk and pursue wild creatures.

As my legs grew stronger and my agility increased I would stare out of my window and reflect that my way to freedom would soon be open before me. Unclimbable as that wall was to any normal human, to a human cat it was not. I could dig my claws into the mortar between bricks, into crevices, and hold on while I leaped from window to window. I was sure I could get out of the window, leap from sill to sill, and so reach the wing, leap a gap between two roofs, reach a tree and so to the ground.

At last the night came when I tried it. Trembling, yet thrilled by adventure, I crouched on the window ledge. I wondered whether I could make it. To a man it was an unthinkable leap that I was trying, yet my cat's instinct seemed to whisper to me that I could do it, that there was no need to stay locked up in this man-made prison any longer.

I sprang. I reached the other window. I held. My instinct was justified. I reached the guttering of the wing, jumped the gap between two roofs, landed in the tree.

I was away.

In the woods I came upon rabbits, stalked and chased them. Presently to my great delight I caught one. With teeth and claws I tore the body, and ate some of it. The warm blood tasted glorious.

Then I began climbing, after birds. My claws helped me greatly. But here I overestimated my skill. A branch that looked strong cracked as I landed on it. I crashed to the ground, hurting my ankle.

A fall seldom hurts a cat, which is light, can turn in midair to land on its feet and use its tail as a brake. But I had the weight of a man, and my tail, which I tried to use, was as yet barely six inches long. I was wretchedly disappointed over this trivial matter.

In a small woodland glade, several miles from the asylum, where there was no smell of human feet, I went to sleep. The sun rose in a cloudless sky, and its heat was delightful on my naked body. But here again I blundered.

When I woke in the afternoon my skin was stinging and burning all over. My instincts had assumed that my body was completely covered with fur, whereas only a part of my back and chest were protected from the sunlight as yet. The full power of a summer sun had blazed away all day long on the rest of me. I was severely sunburned.

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During the next few days I was tortured by a badly peeling skin. I could not sit or lie down without putting my weight on some part of me that it was agony to touch. And my wrenched ankle would not let me stand up for long.

Then rain began to pelt down. There was no shelter that I could find. Under the trees the wind blew the drops off the leaves with stinging fury. I was wretchedly cold and wet. And I was very, very hungry, for, with my wrenched ankle I could not get near the rabbits or the birds.

The life of a wild cat was not all it had seemed to be.

AND now, incomprehensibly, memory was coming back to me. Pictures would come to me, scenes of my childhood days. They fitted in not at all with this life of a feline creature of the woods. I would see the children I had played with when I was small, my father and mother, Peter as a boy. I would squirm in misery and bewilderment, wondering what these strange scenes were that rose unbidden in my mind.

The past and the present were as two voices calling me, and steadily the past grew stronger. As a man awakening from a dream, I knew who I was.

But what had been happening, and what was I, Colonel James Montgomery, doing in these woods, naked, with my body a cross between a human body and that of a giant cat? Was I an outcast from human society for evermore? Was it possible for me to return and mix with my kind again?

And I had been fighting for the rebels, against my own comrades. I had been made into a traitor and deprived even of my human form. I shook my fist in the air, my fist that was developing into a padded paw, and shouted,

"I will be revenged!"

Then I made my way back to the asylum. Several people whom I met on the way screamed and ran. I suppose I was not a pleasant spectacle.

At the gates of the asylum the men in charge goggled at me with open mouths.

"I am Colonel James Montgomery," I said. "I recently had quarters in this, ah! hotel of yours, and left in a hurry. I would like to see the officer in charge."

I was stark naked, smothered with dirt and scratches from brambles, large areas of my body were covered with fur, tabby fur, and I had a six-inch furry tail.

It took them some little time to realize that I was the escaped patient, and then I was soon shown in. The asylum doctor came to me at once.

"So you have come back," he said, wondering. "They tell me that you remember who you are."

"I am Colonel James Montgomery of the army of the United States," I said. "Send for Peter as quickly as possible."

"We will fetch your brother without delay," he promised, "but first you must have a bath and a meal."

When he came, Peter put his arms around me and wept on my tabby chest.

"I AM certain," said the eminent surgeon, "that what brought your memory back was the sunburn."

"I do not understand," I said. "I am a simple soldier. How can sunburn restore a man's memory?"

"Well," he explained, "sunlight on the human skin produces Vitamin D. Vitamin D controls the calcium and phosphorus of the blood and enables us to produce bones and teeth. It also helps the system to eliminate many germs and poisons.

"You will remember that I said your

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system might itself throw off these poisons that have been introduced into it. Apparently it was able to do so, but only after it had been strengthened for the task by large supplies of Vitamin D.

"Regard the poisons as an invading army. Your army of defense was able to defeat and drive out the invader, but only after it had received the necessary arms and munitions."

"This is a queer war," I said. "Shall I change back into a normal man again?"

"I am afraid not, but the change will go no further."

"Hrmmmmp!" said I. "Well, there are compensations. How will this affect my commission?"

"Sorry to tell you, but you have already been retired, on pension."

"So they want no freak Colonels, eh?"

"They say," said Peter, uncomfortably, "that they could not expect men to regard you now as an officer in the same way as they would a normal man."

"Good!" I said.

"But, Jim! I thought you would be upset at the news."

"I'm not," I said. "I'm not a man now. I'm half a cat. And the cat walks alone. Remember the old saying?

"Cats don't fight in packs or herds. I'll fight this swine who calls himself the Master in my own way and in my own time. I shall strike in stealth and secrecy.

"Now, first, let us lay plans. Show me the lay of the land. How can I strike? How can the dupes of this Master be brought back to remember who they are, and to boil as I boil, with murderous fury against the man who has done this to them? Must I strip all the Master's soldiers naked and tie them up to lie in the sunshine?"

"Oh, no," the surgeon said. "It is not as difficult as that. There are other ways of getting Vitamin D into human systems in large quantities. It can be eaten, or it can be injected."

"All prisoners must be injected, then. When they remember who they are and what has happened to them they will boil with intense hatred of the man who as done it. Nothing else will seem to them to matter."

"That will no doubt be done."

"Right. Now give me the auto I was sent here to fetch. I will return with it. I will tell them that I was captured by government forces but escaped. That will explain why I have been so long away. Give me a hypodermic needle and a supply of Vitamin D. I will do all the harm I can to this devilish Master."

Peter turned to the surgeon.

"What do you think?"

"The position of the government is desperate. I would do nothing to stop a man from helping his country now. I will get you a needle and a supply of pure crystalline Vitamin D. You can either drop it into food and drink or dissolve it in the fluid I shall give you and inject it into people's veins. Injection is a very much quicker method, in fact it takes only an hour to take effect."

"Be careful," said Peter.

My brain was full of a cold, merciless hatred. To the intelligence of a man I had added the cunning and stealth of a cat. And, due to the extra-strong dose of the serum, whatever it was, that had been given to me, I was more catlike and stealthy than any other among the Master's slaves.

I was a dangerous man. And a more dangerous animal.

TAKING the auto, I drove away. Going by night, it was quite easy for me to pass through the government

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lines. In fact, the confusion of the rapid advance of the human cats was such that I was able to drive straight from government territory into rebel territory without seeing a government soldier, except in the distance.

Once through the lines I soon made myself known to the first rebel company I met, and told my story. On I went. Very soon I was back at the big commandeered house that the Master had made his headquarters, and reported to my Major. The story of my supposed capture and escape I had to repeat many times. I was congratulated by everybody.

Then life went on much as it had done before I had been sent to spy in government territory, except that now I had to take care not to betray the knowledge that had come back to me. I looked around carefully. On my skill and cunning much might depend, even the very existence of my country.

I needed accomplices, but not too many.

And I needed to try out the effect of my injection.

Out of sight of everybody, I sprang upon and overpowered another man. I must have terrified him, for despite stringent regulations many cases had occurred of the Master's slaves springing upon and trying to devour one another. Several had been killed and even partly eaten in this way. The instincts of beasts of prey chafed at restrictions, broke out again and again.

I gave my victim an injection, as I had been shown, and watched what happened. At the injection he stopped struggling. He lay still. I waited for an hour to pass, assuring him that I would do him no harm.

The frightened look faded slowly from his eyes. He groaned.

"What has been happening?" he asked. I knew then that memory was coming back to him.

Very soon he remembered all. He had been a soldier in the American army until captured by the Master's forces, and then, "Everything seemed to go crazy." He was keen to help me in every possible way.

"Help me get into the kitchen," I said. "I mean to doctor the food on a big scale. Bring memory back to many of them, as I have brought it back to you. Tell me how I can do it."

"There is always a strong guard on the kitchen," he said. "I might possibly succeed in getting in through the window. Give me your needle."

Although I did not like parting with them, I gave him my implements of war. And I lay among the bushes watching his attempt on the kitchen.

As he had said, there was a strong guard. As he reached the window-sill a sharp voice rang out. A uniformed sentry roughly ordered him down.

"Do you know that you can be executed for that?" the sentry demanded. "All climbing is forbidden on pain of death."

"I wasn't doing any harm," pleaded the man I had treated. "I just felt I must climb."

I had the sights of my silent revolver lined on that sentry's head, and could have shot him easily, but I did not want to do anything that might give the game away if I could help it.

With a catlike spring, my accomplice suddenly had his arm around the sentry's neck. I saw the point of the needle go in and the plunger rammed home. The sentry reeled.

Other guards came running. My accomplice plunged into the bushes.

"Take these," he said, handing over needle and chemicals, and he was gone.

I STROLLED out of the bushes casually. The sentries asked me, ex-

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citedly, where the man had gone who had attacked their comrade. I sent them in the wrong direction. The sentry who had been injected now said that he felt much better. Interest in his attacker began to fade out.

I strolled casually about the yard, watching that sentry. I saw that puzzled, dazed look come into his eyes. I knew that memory had come back to him.

Then I walked up to him. I looked him full in the eyes. "I know what you know," I said.

He said, "I was a soldier in the regular army. What am I doing here? What has been happening?"

His distress was touching.

I said, "Your memory was stolen from you. I have given it back to you. Do you still wish to do your duty by your country?

"Only tell me what I can do."

"Let me into the kitchen," I said. "I will see that memory returns to many as it has returned to you."

"I will let you into the kitchen," he said. "But not through that window. Wait until I finish my turn of duty here. Then I will show you another way that you can go in without being seen by anybody."

Two hours later my two accomplices and I were in the kitchen, doctoring the food.

Then we slipped out and began to await events.

IT was difficult to mix with the other men calmly, as though nothing had happened. We practised shooting, joined in at the doctored meals, listened to orders that we knew would never be carried out.

It took so long for the vitamins we had put into the food to take effect that we began to get worried about it, but at last we began to spot men standing about with bewildered looks in their eyes as though they wondered where they were. Like men slowly waking up. And we knew that their memories were returning.

Discipline became slack. Sentries forgot their duties. Officers forgot their authority, let men do as they pleased as they puzzled over the problem of who they were and what they were doing.

My two accomplices mixed with them, helping them, telling them that they were soldiers of Uncle Sam still, that it was their duty to fight against the Master, not for him, and so on.

"O. K. boys," I said. "But before you start a mutiny that way see that the telephone wires are cut so that the Master can't send for reinforcements. I'll pop inside and see if I can upset the electricity supply and put the radio out of action."

I went through the doors.

Nobody was to be seen inside.

I found the main fuses unattended, and soon had all the electric current in the house cut off.

I came out into the corridor again. The house was oddly silent. An impulse to prowl came to me. I went up the stairs.

The guard was missing from the corridor above. I opened the door of the Master's room. There was nobody in it. I tried other doors.

Presently I found him. He was on all fours on the floor, naked. He had a tail about two feet long, and to it was tied a ball of colored wool. He was chasing this ball of wool like a kitten playing.

It seemed so strange to find the dictator of half America in this ridiculous attitude that I laughed.

At once he spun round and jumped to his feet.

"How did you get in here?" he spat

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at me.

"Your guards are neglecting their duties," I said. "I wanted to speak to you."

He jabbed a paw on the bell.

"You can ring," I said. "Nobody will answer you."

"Why not?"

"Because," I said, "memory has come back to them. They have found you out. You are beaten."

"Is thaa-at so?" he asked, very slowly and hissingly.

"I advise you to surrender to me. I am a soldier of the United States."

"Must I?"

"It will be better for you. Before long now your men will realize that they are all of one mind. Then they will attack you. A blind fury will fill them, a bitter thirst for revenge. They will exact vengeance on you for all that you have done."

"Attack me. Exact vengeance on me," he repeated, staring. "Well, if I must," he said, rising. And in the same moment he sprang.

I was not prepared for that leap. He was more of a tiger than a domestic cat. My revolver was knocked away. In fact, I forgot about it. In the moment of danger my instinct was to fight as a cat fights.

We struggled on the floor. My clothes were torn to shreds by his claws. He tried to rip open my stomach with his claws on his feet, strained for my throat with his long, tearing teeth. But I was stronger and younger than he. I remembered that I was a man. My fist thumped his head until I knocked him dizzy. Then I was soon on top of him and giving him a really stiff injection in his throat.

At that he stopped fighting.

LIKE angry cats we eyed one another, the Master and I. Injecting him had been a sudden idea, an arrow at a venture. His appearance had made me think that perhaps he was suffering from the same trouble as his slaves. In any case, there was nothing lost by trying it.

I sat, watching the effect come over him. It would take about an hour, as it had done with the other two.

Outside, through the window, I saw men talking. I saw others besides my two accomplices addressing crowds. And I knew that soon they would be swarming into the building, demanding explanations. Every moment their memories grew stronger.

The familiar puzzled look came into the Master's eyes. He groaned.

"Where am I? What has been happening?" he asked, again and again.

At last he said, "I was a scientist, and wealthy. I studied the endocrine glands of animals, particularly of cats. I thought that if men could see in the dark it would be an enormous advantage. There would be a saving of artificial light, fewer accidents.

"I isolated the hormones I wanted, and after a lot of work succeeded in producing them artificially. I tried them on animals without apparent harm, then I tried them on myself. Then all this happened.

"The hormones must have poisoned me somehow. I forgot who I was. I forgot everything except my artificial hormones and a scheme to conquer the world with an army that could see in the dark.

"And now we are going to get away from here," I said grimly. "Visit all your commanders. Tell them to stop fighting and order the men to surrender to the regular army at once."

He reached for the telephone.

"That's no good. I've had the wires cut."

"But I have the radio," he said.

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"I've put a stop to that, too," I said.

"What can I do?" he moaned in terror. "The soldiers are coming in. They are thirsting for my blood. They will kill me."

He was nothing but an anxious, frightened old man now. I was sorry for him; hated myself for the emotion. The animal in me fought with the man.

"There is a way out," I said. "I know, because I escaped that way before. We must get out of the window."

As the soldiers poured along the corridor, shouting, "Death to the Master!" two highly developed human cats leaped from window to window, up to the eaves, over the roof, down a drain pipe and away.

Peter's auto was unguarded, and in it we sped away.

We met the company coming to crush the mutiny, and we sent it in another direction. And we drove through the country, ordering every commander to stop fighting and surrender. Some of them were very surprised. Some of them the Master made to submit tamely while I injected them. I could have done with more of the Vitamin D fluid.

But as it was I forced the Master to stop the civil war pretty thoroughly.

That is the true story of the sudden end of the Second Civil War of the United States, and of the disappearance of the self-styled Master. For I took him away.

I was sorry for him. Nothing that he had done was he really responsible for: it was an accident that had happened to him. The authorities might not have looked at it that way. I was no longer a soldier. Therefore I took him and hid him.

Where we are now does not matter.

Sometimes I look at him, and see the inscrutable glare of the beast of prey come into his eyes. And I wonder. Have I been wise? Or is he even now thinking up some new scheme of world conquest?

Sometimes at night we go out together catching rabbits, ducks, partridges, pheasants or foxes. For we can still see in the dark, our hands and feet still have claws, and we are still remarkably swift, agile and silent.

The mark of the cat, or of the tiger, is still on us. It grows stronger in me. Someday I will lose my human pity, and then I will kill the Master. For he is *all* cat—and all treachery. Someday. . . . Someday—soon!

THESE THINGS CALLED GENES

NOT so long ago a young woman came to Johns Hopkins University and pleaded with Dr. John J. Abel that he save her from turning into a man! Dr. Abel found that the strange male characteristics of this young lady were being caused by an excessive secretion of the ductless glands. He further traced the trouble to a tumor. By removing the tumor Dr. Abel was able to send the girl away with the prospect of a happy normal life as a girl! But the real seat of all this trouble were those microscopically invisible rods of granules called genes.

All of our cell tissue is composed of hundreds of genes which play a leading role in the drama of life, heredity, and evolution. All of these genes are not alike and it is through different combinations of them that a prospective human being has blue eyes instead of brown, is a male instead of a female, is a blonde instead of a brunette, or is a great writer instead of a ditch digger! Today we know that the difference between a Charles Dickens and a moron is in the accidental combination of a few sets of genes!

Presumably genes are controlled by the ductless glands and it was by returning the ductless glands to a normal state that Dr. Abel gave the young girl back her normal life. Does this mean that in the near future we will somehow be able to control the ductless glands and in turn control genes? Not only does this possibility exist, but we may be able to go further and produce more than a mere superman—we may be able to produce men who will be talented writers, painters, statesmen, or engineers at will.

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L. Sprague de Camp

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers

SKALD IN THE POST OAKS

A few months ago, Sprague de Camp phoned me to tell me that he was working on a new book—one devoted to the authors *of heroic fantasy. Would we be interested in publishing it in FANTASTIC? he wondered. Each chapter would be complete in itself, dealing with a specific author, and the first would be about Robert E. Howard, the creator of Conan. Would we, indeed? There was just one problem, Sprague cautioned: that first chapter ran some ten thousand words—or roughly twice what we could easily fit into an issue. When he sent it to us, he noted, "It took three retypings to whittle the original 10,000 words of my sample chapter down to the present length." What follows, then, will whet your appetite for the full chapter when published in book form—and, we trust, for those chapters to follow. They won't be appearing here every issue, but as often as possible, probably in alternation with Fritz Leiber's* Fantasy Books *column.*

The land around Cross Plains, Texas, is flat with a gentle roll. In aboriginal days it was well-wooded country, covered by an open stand of a small oak, the post oak or jack oak. Cross Plains stands amid this flat, limitless vastness. And in Cross Plains dwelt Robert E. Howard (1906-36), the creator of Conan and, next to Tolkien, the most widely-read author of heroic fantasy.

Robert Ervin Howard was born in Peaster, Texas, near modern Weatherford. His father was Dr. Isaac Howard, a frontier physician. After several moves, about 1919 the family settled in Cross Plains, in almost the exact center of the state.

Today, Cross Plains harbors about 1,200 people—300 fewer than when Howard lived. While Brownwood, forty-odd miles to the southeast, has during this time grown from 14,000 to 20,000, people say that time has passed Cross Plains by. Save for some new service stations, the town has changed little in recent decades. But Cross Plains is a pleasant-looking little town,

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with neat modern bungalows surrounded by the lawns and plantings of the typical contemporary suburban American home.

As a boy, Robert Howard was puny and bookish, with a schizoid personality. A schizoid pays less than normal heed to the effects of his acts upon others. In the current jargon, he fails to "relate" to them. Professional thinkers and writers, I suspect, are mostly somewhat schizoid, or they would not be thinkers and writers. When a schizoid personality is combined with a puny body and bookish tastes, the individual is a "misfit" and a natural butt of bullies. For such a wretch, boy life is a jungle, with the individual playing the role of a rabbit.

As he grew older, however, the harassed Howard embarked upon a rigorous program of weight-lifting, bag-punching, and other calisthenics. By the time he entered Cross Plains High School, he was a large, powerful youth. The bullying stopped, albeit Howard did not become a bully in his turn.

He remained a sport and exercise fanatic all his life. When fully grown, he was just under six feet tall and weighed around 200 pounds, nearly all of it muscle. He was an accomplished boxer and rider, owning a horse, and a boxing and football fan. Nobody bothered him then, but his boyhood left him with a permanent streak of cynical misanthropy.

Since the public schools in Cross Plains went only as far as the tenth grade, in 1922 Howard's parents sent him to Brownwood for a year at Brownwood High School. Three years later, they sent him to Brownwood again for a year at Howard Payne Academy, a preparatory school run in connection with Howard Payne College. He graduated from the Academy in 1927.

The following year, he took commercial courses at the college in "shorthand, typing, business arithmetic, and commercial law" but received no college credits. He later wrote: "A literary college education probably would have helped me immensely . . . I might have liked college . . . That's neither here nor there; I didn't feel that I could afford it . . ." At this time, Howard was educating himself by wide reading. During summers, he broke into locked schoolhouses and carried off the books in a bag; but he always returned them.

In 1921, at fifteen, Howard chose writing as his career and sent a story to *Adventure Magazine*, whence it promptly returned. In 1923, *Weird Tales* was launched. In the fall of 1924, at Brownwood, Howard sold his first commercial story: a cave-man tale, "Spear and Fang." *Weird Tales* had just come under the editorship of Farnsworth Wright, who paid Howard $16.00 for his piece.

Besides his studies, Howard held minor jobs like surveying and soda-jerking. He joined a coterie of eight or ten young people of literary tastes, living in or near Brownwood. He continued writing for *Weird Tales;* during the next two years he sold that magazine four more stories. All were

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undistinguished fictions of the standard *WT* type: "The Lost Race" a tale of conflict between Celt and Pict in ancient Britain; "The Hyena" and "Wolfshead" about African lycanthropy.

Such a time of groping and struggle is usual in a writer's career. Howard's distinction is that he did so well for a completely self-taught writer, dwelling in an uncongenial environment and isolated from professional contacts.

In 1928, Howard set down on paper a fictional character whom he had long borne in mind: Solomon Kane, an English Puritan of the late sixteenth century. The story was "Red Shadows," published in *Weird Tales* for August, 1928. Kane differs from most of Howard's heroes, who were brawny, brawling, belligerent adventurers. Kane is somber of dress, dour of manner, rigid of principles, and driven by a demonic urge to wander, to seek danger, and to right wrongs. In the Kane stories, some of which take place in Europe and some in Africa, Kane undergoes gory adventures and overcomes supernatural menaces.

Howard was now making a meager living from his writings. *Weird Tales* remained his principal market, even though in 1929 he branched out, with stories in *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* and *Fight Stories*. In the decade following "Red Shadows," he appeared in about two thirds of all issues of *Weird Tales*, even though many appearances were only of poems.

Howard produced a sizable volume of poetry, much of which has been published. Like his prose, his verse is vigorous, colorful, strongly rhythmic, and technically adroit, despite the fact that he said: "I know nothing at all about the mechanics of poetry—I couldn't tell you whether a verse was anapestic or trochaic to save my neck."[1]

Now and then, Howard took off in his Chevrolet for a long drive to some historic site in the Southwest or to Mexico; but he always returned to Cross Plains. He continued his physical routine; lean at twenty, he became massive as he neared thirty. In maturity he was a big, heavy-set man with black hair, blue eyes under heavy black brows, a round, slightly jowly face, and a deep but soft voice.

He drank—mostly beer—but did not smoke. He was known to get drunk, but rarely, and he never got into fights. The drunken brawls and wenching at which his letters hint were, my informants agreed, mostly or wholly imaginary.

Howard was a man of emotional extremes and of violent likes and dislikes. His personality was introverted, moody, and unconventional. When he felt like it, he could hold forth brilliantly on almost any subject; but he might instead go into a fit of gloom and say nothing to a friend who had come a long way to see him. He was hot-tempered, flaring up easily but cooling off just as quickly. Even his close friends found him an enigma. As one of them put it:

"He just didn't give a damn for a lot of things that other people do."

With such a voracious reader, it is hard to be sure that he was *not*

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influenced by any given predecessor. Jack London was one of his favorite writers, and he esteemed Sir Richard F. Burton's marratives of travel and exploration. In his stories, the influence of London and of Robert W. Chambers, Talbot Mundy, Harold Lamb, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Sax Rohmer, and H.P. Lovecraft is patent.

Three strong influences on Howard's fiction were, first, the romantic primitivism of London and Burroughs; second, a fascination with Celtic history and legend; and third, the racial beliefs current in the United States in the 1920s. Howard's primitivism is summed up by a remark made by a character in "Beyond the Black River": "Barbarism is the natural state of mankind. Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph." He argued at length in his correspondence with H.P. Lovecraft, upholding the superiority of barbarism over civilization.

Howard gave vent to his primitivism in the stories he wrote in 1929 about a gigantic barbarian hero named Kull. A native of stone-age Atlantis, Kull makes his way to the main or Thurian continent, becomes a soldier in Valusia, and usurps the throne of that kingdom. As King Kull, he encounters sorcerers, pre-human reptile men, and a talking cat. Howard sent several of these stories to *Weird Tales*. Wright accepted two—"The Shadow Kingdom" and "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune"—and rejected the rest.

Of remotely Scotch-Irish descent, Howard made an affectation of Celticism. One St. Patrick's day, he appeared in a green bow tie two feet across. He exploited his Celtomania by stories laid in the British Isles in ancient and medieval times, dealing with the struggles of Pict and Briton, of Briton and Roman, and of Gael and Norseman.

Many of Howard's views would today be stigmatized by that all-purpose pejorative "racist." In presenting a racist view, Howard merely followed most popular writers of the time, to whom ethnic stereotypes were stock in trade. Writers and readers alike took it for granted that fictional Scots should be thrifty, Irishmen funny, Germans arrogant, Jews avaricious, Negroes childish, Latins lecherous, and Orientals sinister. Howard's racial attitudes were compounded by a conventional Southern white outlook, including a sentimental sympathy for the Confederacy.

Howard's primitivism, however, gave his ethnic attitudes an element of paradox. He might view Negroes as incurably barbaric; but to him that was not altogether bad, since he thought that barbarians had virtues lacking in civilized men. In criticizing French novelists, he said: "Dumas has a virility lacking in other French writers—I attribute it to his negroid strain . . ."[1] If a racist, Howard was a comparatively mild one; and his writings imply that as with Lovecraft, his ethnic prejudices abated as he grew older.

Politically—racial questions aside—Howard was a vigorously anti-authoritarian liberal. When Lovecraft praised Mussolini, Howard took

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vehement exception. In religion, he was not a Texan Baptist like his parents but, like many writers of heroic fantasy, an agnostic who made up his own pantheon for the sake of his stories but did not take his synthetic gods seriously.

With the opening of wider markets, Howard was busier than ever during 1929-32. He wrote several weirds in the frame of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. He widened his production to include sport, adventure, oriental, and historical stories. He sustained personal misadventures; later he wrote Clark Ashton Smith:

For a fellow who has always lived a quiet, peaceful, and really prosaic life, I've had my share of narrow shaves: horses running away with me and falling on me; one threw me and then jumped on me; one turned a complete somersault in mid-air and landed on her back which would have mashed me like a bed-bug if I hadn't been hurled over her head as she fell; went head-on through a bed-room window once; knife stuck into my leg behind the knee, once, a hair's breadth from that big artery that runs there; stepped right over a diamond-backed rattler in the dark, etc.[2]

There were also darker sides to Howard's character. As early as 1923 he began toying with the idea of suicide. This is not unusual with adolescents, but in Howard's case the idea grew stronger with time. He was heard to say: "My father is a man and can take care of himself, but I've got to stay on as long as my mother is alive."[3] Some of his poems express the wish to be quit

Of this world of human cattle,
All this dreary noise and prattle.

As one can see from Howard's really rather quiet and secluded life, the din and struggle of which he complained were all within him.

The mutual devotion between Howard and his mother is a classical case of the Oedipus complex. In his late twenties, a decade after most youths do, Howard at last began to go with girls. For years he had excused his misogyny by saying: "Aw, what woman could ever look at a big, ugly hulk like me?" But, when Howard began at last to display a normal male regard for women, his mother discouraged this new interest. One visitor reported that, when a girl called Howard on the telephone, Mrs. Howard told the caller that he was not in, although he was and she knew it.

Howard's father, Isaac Howard, seems to have been an extremely bossy, self-assertive, overbearing man—an unattractive domestic tyrant, although E. Hoffman Price (the only professional writer Howard ever met) liked the doctor when he visited Cross Plains. Doctor Howard and his son quarreled frequently and furiously, often because Howard took his father to task for neglecting his mother. Although they quickly made up these quarrels, there seems to have been little love lost between them.

Howard also began to show symptoms of paranoid delusions of persecution. He took to carrying a Colt .32 automatic pistol against probably

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imaginary "enemies." The local people regarded him as a "harmless freak." They asked him when he was going to quit fooling around with stories and settle down to real work, even when he was working longer hours and making more money than most Cross Plainsians. But despite the hostile human environment, he stubbornly stuck to Cross Plains.

In 1932, Howard made up his most successful character: Conan the Cimmerian. He wrote:

It may sound fastastic to link the term "realism" with Conan; but as a matter of fact—his supernatural adventures aside—he is the most realistic character I have ever evolved. He is simply a combination of a number of men I have known, and I think that's why he seemed to step full-grown into my consciousness when I wrote the first yarn of the series. Some mechanism in my sub-consciousness took the dominant characteristics of various prizefighters, gunmen, bootleggers, oil field bullies, gamblers, and honest workmen I have come in contact with, and combining them all, produced the amalgamation I call Conan the Cimmerian.[3]

In conceiving Conan, Howard invented a whole world to go with him. He assumed that about 12,000 years ago, after the sinking of Atlantis and before recorded history, there was a Hyborian Age, when

. . . shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars—Nemedia, Ophir, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery, Zingara with its chivalry, Koth that bordered on the pastoral lands of Shem, Stygia with its shadow-guarded tombs, Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold. But the proudest kingdom of the world was Aquilonia, reigning supreme in the dreaming west.

Conan was a development of King Kull and also an idealization of Howard himself: a gigantic barbarian adventurer from the northern land of Cimmeria, who, after a lifetime of wading through rivers of gore and dompting foes both natural and supernatural, rises to king of Aquilonia.

Howard envisaged the entire life of Conan, from birth to old age, and caused him to grow and develop like a real man. At the start, Conan is merely a lawless, reckless, irresponsible, predatory youth with few virtues save courage, loyalty to his few friends, and a rough-and-ready chivalry towards women. In time he learns not only caution and prudence but also duty and responsibility, until by middle age he has matured enough to make a good king. On the contrary, many heroes of heroic fantasy seem, like the characters of Homer and of P.G. Wodehouse, to have the enviable faculty of staying the same age for half a century at a stretch.

The self-taught Howard achieved a preeminently sound, unobtrusive prose style. He wrote in sentences of short to medium length and simple construction, as others learned to do

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after the Hemingway revolution of the thirties. He could give the impression of a highly colorful scene while making only sparing use of action-slowing adjectives and adverbs. He was a devotee of the "well-wrought tale" as opposed to the "slice-of-life" school of fiction. Stories of either kind have their place; but for pure, escapist entertainment—which Howard's stories were meant to be—the former type is more suitable.

As a writer, Howard had faults as well as virtues. His faults arose mainly from haste. Hence his stories contain many inconsistencies and slipshod carelessnesses. He tended to repeat certain elements in story after story: the combat with a gigantic serpent (Howard hated snakes) or man-ape; the vast, green stone city built on the lines of the Pentagon; the flying menace in the form of a winged ape or demon.

Critics have also held against Howard the author's immaturity in human relationships, especially in his heroes' attitude towards women, and the violence of the tales. Conan swaggers about the Hyborian scene, bedding one willing wench after another; but women are viewed as mere toys. True, Conan at last takes a legitimate queen, but this is a mere afterthought. Howard was evidently as uncomfortable with love as the small boy who, viewing a Western, is loudly disgusted when the hero kisses the heroine instead of his horse. Furthermore, one critic was so staggered by the splashing of gore that he said Howard's stories "project the immature fantasy of a split mind and logically pave the way to schizophrenia."

What seems like excessive bloodshed and emotional immaturity, however, were normal in the pulp fiction of Howard's time. Writers did not then deem it their duty to endow their heroes with social consciousness, to sympathize with downtrodden ethnics, to detail the mechanical problems of copulation, and to make it plain that they were on the side of peace, equality, and social welfare.

Withal, Howard was a natural storyteller, and this is the *sine qua non* of fiction-writing. With this knack, many of a writer's faults can be overlooked; without it, no other virtues do any good. Whatever their shortcomings, Howard's writings will long be enjoyed for their zest, vigor, furious action, and headlong narrative drive; for his "purple and golden and crimson universe where anything can happen—except the tedious."

Beginning in 1932, most of Howard's time was taken up with the Conan stories. For months, the mighty Cimmerian obsessed him to the exclusion of all else. Then he branched out into detective stories and Westerns. The detective stories, which contained fantastic elements like sinister oriental cults and African leopard-men, were no great success, even though Howard sold several.

He did better with his Westerns. After he engaged Otis Adelbert Kline as his literary agent in 1933, he found his Western market expanding. Over twenty stories in this genre were sold in the three years before his death. Many

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were informed with a broad frontier humor, close to burlesque.

Humor was a new departure for Howard, whose previous stories had nearly all been somber in tone. Some critics consider his Westerns his best work. His Western heroes are as big as Conan, even less bright, and genial in a homicidal way. Howard explained his preference for heroes of mighty thews and simple minds:

"They're simpler. You get them in a jam, and no one expects you to rack your brains inventing clever ways for them to extricate themselves. They are too stupid to do anything but cut, shoot, or slug themselves into the clear."[4]

In one of his last letters, Howard indicated that he might quit fantasy: "I'm seriously contemplating devoting all my time and efforts to Western writing, abandoning all other forms of work entirely . . ."[1]

The years 1933-36 were busy. Howard's Western market was growing, and for a while he earned the most money of any man in Cross Plains—even more than the local banker. Of course, this was in the depths of the Great Depression, when bankers were harried and $2,500.00 a year was an opulent income. Howard's circumstances were never exactly easy, since word rates were low, magazines on which he had counted failed, and his mother's illness caused him heavy expenses. Mrs. Howard had been in poor health for years and now was in rapid decline. Still, whatever Howard's maladjustments, money troubles do not seem to have been among them.

His circle of correspondents grew, with many letters passing between him and Clark Ashton Smith and between him and H.P. Lovecraft. He dated Novalyne Price, a teacher of public speaking at the local high school. She was considered a little eccentric, too, being such a perfectionist with her pupils that they repeatedly won the annual Texan University Interscholastic League contest in public speaking. In July, 1935, Howard broke off his friendship with Miss Price by a bitter letter in which he accused her of making fun of him to a mutual friend behind his back.

Mrs. Howard's health continued to decline. On June 11, 1936, hopelessly ill with cancer, she was in a coma. The nurse told Howard that his mother would never regain consciousness. Howard went out and got into his car. About 8:00 a.m., still in the car, he shot himself through the head with his pistol. His suicide was not the result of any sudden impulse, for the previous week he had sent the Kline agency a manuscript with instructions for paying the money from its sale in case of his death.

Howard's suicide sent a wave of amazement and grief through his circle of friends and admirers. Lovecraft wrote: "That such a genuine artist should perish while hundreds of insincere hacks continue to concoct spurious ghosts and vampires and space-ships and occult detectives is indeed a sorry piece of cosmic irony!"[4]

Dr. Isaac Howard inherited Howard's estate, and the Kline agency

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sold several of Howard's stories after his death. During the next decade, Howard's writings remained for the most part the private enthusiasm of a few admirers.

The first serious attempt to revive Howard came in 1946, when August Derleth published a collection of Howard's fiction as *Skull-Face and Others*. The reviewer for the New York *Times* was so appalled by the violence of Howard's stories that his review was devoted to warning against the schizophrenic perils of heroic fiction and said little about the stories.

Three years later, a small science-fiction publisher began to issue the Conan stories in a series of cloth-bound volumes. In 1951, I learned of a cache of Howard's manuscripts in the custody of a literary agent who had inherited Kline's agency. Finding three Conan stories among them, I edited these for publication and also rewrote four unpublished adventure stories by Howard, changing them to Conan stories. A Swedish admirer of Howard, Bjorn Nyberg, wrote a novel, *The Return of Conan*, on which I collaborated.

The definitive revival of Howard took place when Lancer Books began in 1966 to bring out the whole Conan corpus in paperback. A Texan admirer, Glenn Lord, became agent for Howard's writings and tracked down a mass of Howard's papers. These included six Conan stories, one complete and the rest fragments or outlines. Lin Carter and I have completed the unfinished stories and have written pastiches to fill the gaps in the saga. How well we have imitated Howard's style and spirit is not for me to say.

The Conan paperbacks touched off a general reprinting of Howard's stories. Within the last five years, at least nine books of Howard's non-Conanian stories have been published. Many tales by Howard, some previously published and some not, have appeared in magazines and anthologies. The magazine *Bestsellers* listed Howard among the eight writers of imaginative fiction whose books have, in the last thirty years, sold over a million copies. The others were Asimov, Bradbury, Burroughs, Heinlein, Andre Norton, E.E. Smith, and Tolkien.

I suspect that this revival is a reaction against some recent trends in fiction. Ever since the Hitlerian War, advance-guard writers have issued stories marked by certain features, carried to questionable extremes. One is the use of experimental narrative techniques: non-sentences, stream-of-consciousness, temporal disorganization, plotlessness, and so forth. Another is extreme subjectivity, or egotistical self-indulgence on the part of the writer. Another is obsession with contemporary social and political problems. Another is concentration on sex, especially in its more peculiar manifestations. Finally there is the vogue of the anti-hero. The protagonist is made, not a likable rogue like many former picaresque heroes, but a despicable rogue, a twerp with neither brains, brawn, nor character, who might have crawled out from under a flat rock.

All these developments have their

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place, up to a point. But, since they have all come at once and have been carried to often bizarre extremes, many readers enjoy for a change reading stories that point in the opposite direction. That is to say, stories of stalwart heroes doing heroic deeds, with plenty of hot action in romantic settings, told in plain, lucid, straightforward prose, without mention of the school dropout problem or the woes of the sexual deviant or other contemporary difficulties. How far this reaction will go, no man knoweth; but while it endures, Howard's publishers stand to profit.

During this revival, Howard has slept beneath the large, plain gravestone in the Brownwood cemetery, where his parents also lie. A panel reads: "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their death they were not divided" (2 Samuel I, 23). But the Howard family was not so harmonious as all that. A more fitting epitaph would be Dr. John D. Clark's introduction to the Conan books: "And above all Howard was a story-teller."

—L. Sprague de Camp

Notes:

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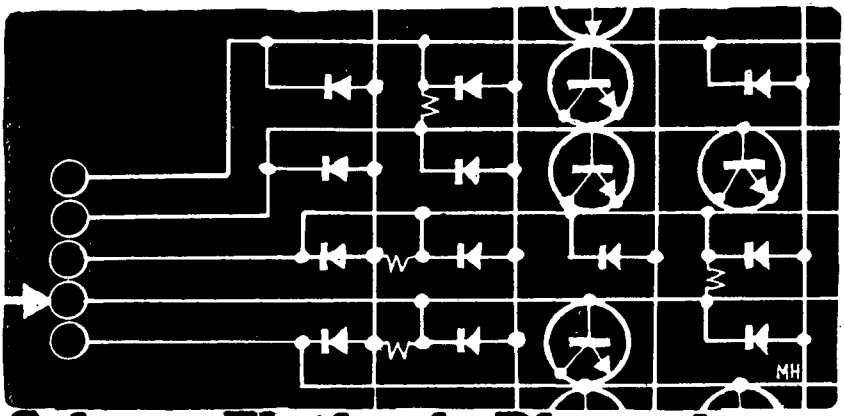

Science Fiction in Dimension

a critical column by ALEXEI PANSHIN

NEW PERSPECTIVE

This past October, I delivered a talk based on my April column for FANTASTIC, which I had just completed, at the third Secondary Universe Conference, an annual academic science fiction convention held this year at Queensborough Community College in New York. In my talk I suggested that Hugo Gernsback's vision of the literature of outer-space-and-the-future as *science fiction*, a prophetic and educational fiction about the possibilities of science, lasted only as long as it was unchallenged. As soon as rival editors appeared, sf inevitably grew beyond the limits of Gernsback's vision. At the same time, we retained Gernsback's name for the genre, *science fiction*, for the comparative respectability it lent us, even though it was not appropriate, even though it unneccessarily constricted the development of the field. *Science fiction* is a theory, a way of organizing our perception of the literature, a basis for both our creation and our criticism. The sheer number of exceptions to the theory—by Gernsback's own reckoning, eight out of the first nine winners of the short fiction Hugo Awards named for him, stories that we cannot and surely should not brand illegitimate—is now so great that the theory can no longer have any hope of a claim to validity as a description of the full scope of the literature of outer-space-and-the-future.

I concluded my talk as I concluded the column: "As Sam Moskowitz has said, 'The real 'Father of Science Fiction' is Hugo Gernsback and no one can take the title away from him.' Science fiction was his dream. We should bury it decently with him."

At this point, I called for questions and comment. The first person to raise his hand was a well-known editor and author in the field. He said, "I think you're beating a dead horse, Alex. You can write anything that you care to write and find a market for it." There was real irony in this because earlier that afternoon we had

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been discussing a story of mine that had been under submission to him. He objected to it because he found it unacceptable as science fiction. Not on other grounds. He thought it was charming and appealing—but unacceptable as science fiction.

It has been the history of the field that material that has looked strange and illegitimate at first appearance has only a few years later become commonplace. I've cited Edmond Hamilton's story "What's It Like Out There?" which could not be published in the early thirties, but fit easily into the field in the early fifties. It would be as easy to cite Jack Vance's Dying Earth stories, which were originally published by Hillman Books, a totally obscure paperback firm, or Cordwainer Smith's "Scanners Live in Vain" which was originally published in *Fantasy Book*, a publication which paid him nothing, after having been rejected by all the paying sf magazines, and is now to be found enshrined as a classic in the SFWA's *Science Fiction Hall of Fame*.

Over and over again, new material has forced its own acceptance and proved that the possibilities of the genre are far greater than Gernsback's definition will admit, amend it as we will. It is no more true today than it has ever been that it is possible to write anything that you care to write and be sure of finding a market. The possibilities allowed are much greater than they once were, but they nowhere approach the true range. Newness still has to fight for legitimacy. Newness may always have to fight for legitimacy, but because our perceptions are distorted by the old theory of *science fiction* this last decade has seen an incredible amount of altogether unneccessary and bitter fighting.

I pursued the point of legitimacy with my friend, the writer-editor, in a letter. He answered, "Without getting involved in another what-is-s-f thing, I would like to stipulate that there is such a thing as s-f, consisting of a constellation of various themes (other worlds, other times, technological change, etc.—you know what they are) handled in a s-fnal manner, the latter being a highly subjective thing that I prefer to define implicitly through my own work rather than explicitly through theory . . . I operate under definitions of s-f that Gernsback would find intolerably loose, but I think Gernsback and I would both agree that (your story) was unacceptable as science fiction whereas, say, my (latest) novel . . . was not. The process of redefining leads us ultimately into an abolition of all categories, which is to say a condition of increased entropy that I find undesirable and deplorable."

If we are to judge by Gernsback's comment on the Hugo Awards, my friend is wrong in thinking that Gernsback would find his latest novel acceptable as science fiction. In fact, his entire comment betrays the difficulty that immediately appears when Gernsback is rejected and appealed to in the same breath.

Redefining does not lead us ultimately into an abolition of all categories. It leads us into a rejection of Gernsback, a rejection of the difficult business of perceiving the field in the old way while simultaneously violating the old perception in every story we write.

I don't wish to abolish all categories. I wish to redefine perception the better to violate Gernsback, the better to take advantage of the true possibilities of the literature of outer-space-and-the-future. Gernsback's theory does not fit the literature. Gernsback-plus-amendments

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means both vagueness and the necessity of continual further amendment. We are in need of a new perception that accurately describes the existing literature without favoring the work of one writer over the work of others—if it could be located, pure Gernsbackian *science fiction* would be as legitimate as the work of LeGuin, or Silverberg, or Lafferty, or name your favorite author, but all possibilities of the form should be considered equally legitimate. The proof is in the story-making, not in the style of story made. Most of all, we are in need of a perception of our literature that promotes rather than hinders the development of new possibility.

The problem now becomes one of finding a common factor that applies to all and favors no one. It is certainly not science, or appreciation of science, or reference to science. It is true that up until now we have for the most part attempted to refer to science as a method of evoking a sense of reality in our stories and because we felt we ought to—the old Gernsbackian imperative—but the legitimate exceptions have made science an option rather than a necessary feature of our literature. The science in an sf story can be inaccurate, as in Nourse's "Brightside Crossing", with its tide-locked Mercury, or deliberately wrong, as in Garrett's Angevin Empire stories in which a murderer can be detected because his image is photographed on the retina of his victim, or it can be missing altogether as in Bradbury or Lafferty or any number of others.

The central factor is not the science fiction vocabulary, either, our familiar set of metaphors: time machines, robots, ray guns, space ships, hyperspace, and so on. It is possible to write legitimate stories without this hardware, and in fact those writers who come to the literature from outside without exposure to our vocabulary can write and have written perfectly adequately without reference to our devices, which are aids but not necessities. In Robert Graves' *Watch the Northwind Rise*, he takes his contemporary poet to the future by dream and incantation rather than time machine and it makes no difference to his story. In Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* we are presented with a future society that uses none of our familiar pool of devices as an aid to "reality" or story manipulation, but suffers no harm though it may seem strange to sf readers. Is such a story part of our literature? I think it is. I don't think we can exclude any story set in the future.

If this is so, it casts immediate doubt on one part of what I take my friend to mean by "handled in an s-fnal manner", that is, "Idea", the variation on a given theme, like a new switch on time travel or a new hyperspace device. This is Larry Niven's chief stock in trade and he is rightly praised for it. This sort of variation has been important in expanding the science fiction vocabulary. It has given us new perspectives and new possibilities, and at the same time it serves as a criticism of the sf that has gone before us, correcting, objecting and amending. If you like, you might say that the relentless search for the new idea has been the chief source of exception to Gernsback. But worthy and deserving of praise though it may be, Idea is too limited to serve as an organizing principle for our literature.

Idea is as important as it has been because the chief vehicle of science fiction has been the pulp magazine and the short story, and the short story would be hard-pressed to exist without Idea, there being

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so little other possible justification for the short flashing vision of the strange. Still, other justifications do exist. Science fiction short stories include morality plays like so many of the Bradbury Mars stories or Sturgeon's recent atrocity, "The Man Who Learned Loving", and ironic statements like so many of Damon Knight's short stories or Robert Silverberg's Nebula winner, "Passengers". There is no doubt that ironies and moralities feed off the material of earlier Idea stories, and this is an indication of the weakness of the science fiction short story. Idea stories are less common today than they once were, and as often as not these days the ideas we are presented are miniscule variations that assume reader familiarity with more striking and powerful originals. That is, the new Ideas are every bit as limited and incestuous as the ironies and moralities.

We do need Idea as an addition to our literary grammar, but its weakness is particularly apparent in longer stories. Idea alone is not enough to sustain a novel, and has not been since the days of *Ralph 124C 41+*. There is no originality of idea in "Flowers for Algernon" or "A Rose for Ecclesiastes". My own *Rite of Passage* depends on cumulative development of a strange situation for its effect—as far as I know, it adds no purely original idea to the sf pool. The same thing could be said of Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*. It is treatment and perspective that are original, not conception. In certain sorts of story that depend on familiarity for appeal—space opera and sword-and-sorcery, for instance—Idea may even be felt as an intrusion on reader expectation.

When we come to the other part of "handled in an s-fnal manner", I think we are much closer to the crucial common factor we are seeking. It is the assumption that featured at the heart of every sf story there should be a difference from what we believe the world to be like, in the phrase of H.G. Wells, whose proposition it effectually is, an "impossible hypothesis". This idea has an immediate plausibility. If there is anything that sf stories abound in, it is difference: gadgets, space travel, aliens, changed societies. Perhaps the easiest way to make an sf story is to assume an impossible hypothesis. This is the basis of the classic *Astounding* story. Hold all else constant. Change one thing. Report the goofiness, or social upset, or adventure that results. Assume rolling roads, and you have "The Roads Must Roll". Assume human furriness, and you have deCamp's "Hyperpilosity". Assume television—or rather, assume ethereal intelligences, since television was a fact of the day, if not a common fact—and you have Sturgeon's "Ether Breather".

We need two immediate adjustments, however. First, Wells only allowed one difference per story: "Any *extra* fantasy outside the cardinal assumption immediately gives a touch of irresponsible silliness to the invention." Because, as he says previously in his introduction to his novels, "Nothing reoains interesting where anything may happen." However, our experience has shown otherwise. Modern sf commonly and effectively multiples its marvels, as in Heinlein's *Time for the Stars*, which comfortably combines an overpopulated future society, telepathy, and two varieties of interstellar travel; or as in any van Vogt or Dick novel. Charles Harness's *Flight into Yesterday* contains every idea that occurred to Harness over a period of two years. Second it isn't necessary that

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the difference should be featured at the heart of the story. Differences can be assumed and thereafter appear only at the periphery of the story. This is certainly the case with adventure stories. In space opera, the differences are cosmetic. The point is adventure. Though stories of the "Jets blasting, Bat Durston came screeching down through the atmosphere of Bbllzznaj, a tiny planet 1000 light years the other side of Sirius . . ." type may seem lame and limited, they are not illegitimate. And more attractive examples ofdifference-only-at-the-periphery are possible to find, for one, Heinlein's "We Also Walk Dogs", in which the center of attention is not building facilities for a conference of intelligent species but rather the problem of persuading a man to do the building. In any character-centered story, of which we have few but could certainly have more, difference retreats to the edges of vision. The point becomes the impact of difference on the character rather than the difference as a thing in itself.

With these two adjustments, we have sf as fiction that contains one or more differences from what we believe the world to be like. This is suggestive, but it isn't sufficient to define. All sf may contain differences from the world that is, but not all stories that contain differences from the world that is are sf. There are differences a-plenty from the familiar world in the James Bond stories—and even more differences in the James Bond films—but they do not force a difference of response. They are not felt as science fiction. The world in Western stories is different from the world that was—incredibly different in many cases—without being felt as sf. Again, a Harold Robbins novel like *The Carpetbaggers* differs from what we know the world to be like without being sf. The classic example may be *Arrowsmith*. Here we have a story in which a cure unknown to present medicine is discovered, but which, as Basil Davenport says, "doesn't read like science fiction". He continues, "I read *Arrowsmith* when it first came out, which must be more than thirty years ago, when I was young and avid for science fiction and there was very little of it around, and I never suspected that this might be a part of what I was looking for."

What are we looking for? What kind of difference is sufficient to make sf? I think the answer lies not in physical and obvious differences from the present *within a story*, but in a difference in perception *in the reader*, a difference in response, a difference in kind, a change of consciousness. What is sf? Sf is that kind of fiction that makes you see a different world than the one that is. The cure of a disease is not enough—it doesn't force a difference of response. If I were to write a story about a cure for cancer, the world would not have seemed to alter enough for the story to be felt as sf, though I describe procedures and anticipate a few consequences. But on the other hand, the cure of *all* disease . . . That would be sf.

As a matter of fact, the original *science fiction* story in AMAZING, Gernsback's science fiction, was frequently very like *Arrowsmith*. It proposed a difference and stopped. Read at the time, this might have been enough to produce a difference in response in the reader. Read today, it seems like nothing at all, which is why this kind of story is no longer written. The migration of *science fiction* into the future and space was made precisely to force you, the reader, to appreciate the marvelous differentness of the wonderful inventions you were presented. And Gernsback would like to have stopped

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 125)

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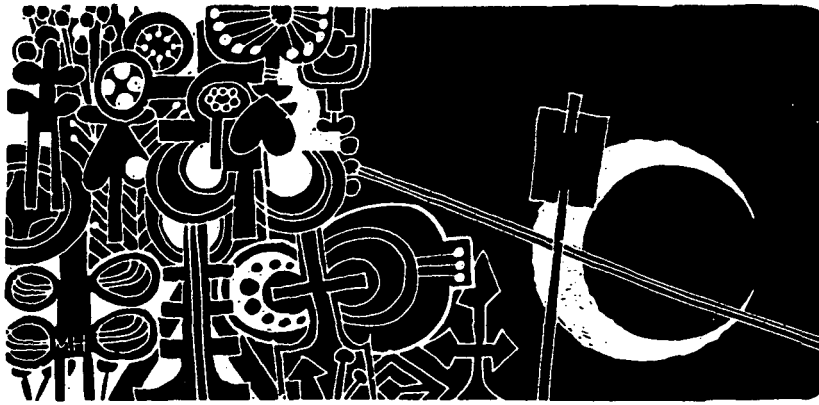

...ACCORDING TO YOU

Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of the sheet only, and addressed to According To You, *P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Virginia, 22046.*

Dear Ted,

I picked up the Dec. copy of FANTASTIC and, as is my wont, I immediately flipped to the editorial and began to read it as I walked home. The brief biographical info on some of your artists found me only slightly interested. I feel that that should be either in a supplement or in a newszine. I do tend to disagree on some of your latest choices of fantasy. Just once I'd like to see a good, typical adventure novel in the tradition of Otis A. Kline, E.R. Burroughs, and R.E. Howard. I think fantasy has picked up a little of that "New Wave" farce that hit sf a while back, and now it has to be "different" in its own way to be good fantasy. Give us stories that we can curl up with and either have the pants scared off us (Lovecraft and to an extent, C.A. Smith) or an adventure that will carry our imaginations to the far land of Foranna where we encounter innumeral foes to be with our incomparable leading lady.

After getting home, I paged to the letter col and began that. The letter by Rev. C.E. Deckard and your subsequent reply are what really prompted me to write. War is an impractical solution, because we have too many nuclear weapons and would destroy the earth. What has to be done is genocide on certain races, or something quite similar (I am right now reminded of your novel, *Spawn of the Death Machine*). Reason: there are over 5 billion people, killing anything less than 2 billion would be a waste of time since mankind would repropogate sufficiently in a hundred years to wipe away all traces of the reduction (remember the millions of Jews killed off by Hitler? How long was it before that many people had been born?). But a question arises, who has the power to pick which race is inferior or who is inferior and should die? I, for one, know that I sure couldn't. So we would need a being like Tanner to do it. God won't because he made a covenant. Perhaps he knew that we'd kill ourselves off, anyway.

I feel that all the strife we have today is

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well deserved. Just as I feel all the benefits and progress and rewards we have today is well deserved. We did it and should be expected to accept the consequences and benefits. Only a few people, though, have the mental capabilities to do so. If we cannot form a satisfactory solution to our problems, then we deserve to die and hope that those who come after us will do a better job than we did. Even in the backwoods of North Dakota, and in the backwash of all backwashes, Devils Lake, there are "drugs." A lot of people don't know how prevalent their use is in North Dakota, but it is proportionally the same as in New York City, or slightly less, but not that much. I don't use them simply because I feel that in a sense, life is one big trip and to be enjoyed to the fullest. Those who use the drugs deserve all the consequences, since it is against the law, and in the publicized cases, reap them in either death, insanity, or "stiff" sentences. On the other hand, there is a small minority (like Donald K. Arbogast) who can sufficiently cope with certain drugs (the reason I say certain drugs is self-explanitory) and will take them when they feel like it and not otherwise. To those people I tip my hat. I don't agree with them, but I respect their choice.

Anything, really, is addictive. I have written two articles (satirical) on how sleep and food are addictive and destroy you. Eventually they will be published in some fanzine, but that's another story.

To any potential drug user, I say, "If you can handle it, that's all right. If you can't, then suffer with your decision." But who knows if you can handle it?

Right now I am looking out my window and watching my younger brother kicking a football in the back yard. He has hit the electrical wires twice already with it. Are those wires pollution?

D. Jon Zimmerman
910 7th Ave.
Devils Lake, ND 58301

You're right, in that overpopulation as it presently exists can be "cured" only by the elimination of a percentage of that population. But this is not likely to occur by design—it is more likely that overbreeding will produce its own cure, such as mental/emotional breakdowns, or plagues. In any case, I should not like to see specific "races" (however you may define the word) wiped out, and I've never advocated anything of that nature in my books. In the book you refer to, Tanner was instrumental in bringing on the Chaos which wiped out much of Earth's population—but he did so by stopping all municipal services on a planet which was largely city. Those who managed to cope, survived. Race played no part in it. On a more concrete level, I am an advocate of Zero Population Growth—and, indeed, Negative Population Growth (one child for every two parents). Were the latter universally practiced, we could halve the world's population in a single generation. A well-known Head of my acquaintance says, "There's nothing wrong with drugs—if they're kept out of the hands of children. You wouldn't give a kid a loaded gun, would you? To deal with drugs, you have to know where your head's at. No kid knows where his head is at—or he wouldn't be a kid." Or, as I think he was trying to say, you have to be mature enough to know what you're doing before you start doing it. "Kids," he says, "are giving drugs a bad name." —TW

Dear Mr. White,

This correspondence is concerned with only one subject: information on the next World SF Convention. I am interested

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(and I assume many other readers of FANTASTIC and AMAZING are also) in such details as where the next worldcon is to be and other relevent information.

If I recall correctly, about a year ago, you mentioned in one of your editorials included in FANTASTIC that the costs are something like $2 to vote and $3 to attend. I would like confirmation on this.

So I hope you will be able to find space within the pages of AMAZING and FANTASTIC to include such information when and if you come by it.

Brian Gerheim
(no address on letter)

The next worldcon will be the Noreascon, the 29th World Science Fiction Convention, and will be held in Boston over the Labor Day weekend of 1971—September 3rd through 6th. For registration or information, write Noreascon, P.O. Box 547, Cambridge, Mass., 02139. However, the prices of both supporting and attending memberships have gone up—and unnecessarily so, in my opinion. To join for voting (non-attending) purposes, the fee is now $4.00. If you wish to attend, it's $6.00. This is double the fees of only a few years ago; they went up a dollar in 1969, and Boston has raised them twice since and threatens additional future raises. And if this weren't bad enough, Los Angeles—which will be hosting the 1972 worldcon—has already publicized higher prices yet. I am willing to state flatly that these fees are in excess of those needed and that the reasons offered for them (rising costs of printing, postage) are meretricious (postage costs haven't risen in the last several years, and printing costs—via access to good, cheaper printers—have gone down). The 1967 worldcon, which I co-chaired, sold its memberships for $2.00 and $3.00 (with a 505 discount at the previous convention to several hundred people) and showed profits of several thousand dollars. The Boston convention chairman has claimed that he is offering more services and these cost money (but this claim was put forward only after I had, in the fan press, demolished his previous claims), but it should be noted that these services are non-essential and probably of little value to the bulk of convention attendees—and of no value whatsoever to non-attending members. It is my opinion that in this "tight-money" period when many sf fans who are students have limited access to money, the first obligation of any convention committee should be to hold down costs as much as possible. I appear to be alone in this belief, however. —TW

Dear Ted:

I must confess to being most unimpressed with Michael Kaluta's first cover for you. His interiors have been most interesting in their own way, and I've enjoyed them. But this particular cover seems both unimaginative and, more important, relatively poorly executed. As I've said before, I don't personally like Jeff Jones' artwork; but his cover about three issues back was beautifully done, and was thus effective. This one seems very plain in comparison, even in comparison to Gray Morrow's mediocre piece for "The Crimson Witch" last issue.

It'd be interesting to find out the general public reaction to Richard Lupoff's immensely entertaining faan-fiction, his "Ova Hamlet" series. I really don't know what justification you use to publish it, but keep doing it by all means. "Battered Like a Brass Bippy" is not fannish masterpiece, but it is a most amusing parody-pastiche. Not quite up to the best I've seen of this style, though,

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which in my experience in fandom was Ginger Buchanan's "I've Had No Sleep and I Must Giggle" from *Granfalloon*. Material likes this always lends a light, enjoyable tone to the whole magazine.

Your editorial this time starts with artists, so let me return to what I said above. Actually, none of your three interest me as much, say, as Gaughan at his best, Gilbert at his best, Austin, Bode, or Fabian at their best. Nonetheless all their interior work *is* interesting, both as something different from the Gaughan/Freas material dominating the other three magazines in the field with interior illos, and simply for its own sake. Jones' interior work for you, as with the Conway story here, seems far more interesting and unusual than most of his regular s&s illustrations elsewhere, and I like it much better. Kaluta's work seems to vary more in style than most other artists, as with his cover (which I really don't like), his page 45 illustration for the Laumer story (which I *do* like), and his completely different illustration on 95 for the "Ova Hamlet" story. To me, though, it does seem as if the cover is less-well-done, less "professional," than most of his other work. And while I'm on art—I really hate the Sid Check thing illustrating the Aldiss story. Looks rather primitive, not nearly up to your usual standards.

Good to hear that Bode—unfettered—will be gracing your pages, especially some of his work with Larry Todd. The Bode/Todd collaborations were some of the most exciting paintings at St. Louiscon, and if what you're getting matches up, the result should be covers suitable for framing. Something about Bode's lines and Todd's colors just seems to fit together so perfectly; the large painting of the multicolored alien head, exhibited in St. Louis, is one of the few sf paintings I'd pay almost anything to own.

Panshin is, need I say it again, excellent as usual; I wonder, though, how much of this particular installment is more concerned with semantic distinctions than with literary discussion. Grossly oversimplified—but, I think, validly so—he seems to be saying here that "science fiction" is very limited, but that "creative fantasy" has no such limitations, or at least *less* limitations. This seems something of the old science fiction/speculative fiction/speculative fabrication/what-have-you argument. He does a fine analysis of Kuhn's paradigm theory in terms of science fiction—but his "new" paradigm is only a name, an empty title. "Creative fantasy is everything science fiction was and more." Is Panshin simply saying that a change in terminology will be an encouraging factor to writers in the field? That freed from the old title and all the old title imples, writers can and should feel free to break away from the existing boundaries? Write about anything, write anything—and call it creative fantasy? I don't know. Obviously he can't really describe the new field; the field will be delinated by those who work within it. But still, I feel the need to know more about what Alexei *means* by "Creative Fantasy." I need more than simply the name.

Tis interesting to note that since you wrote (in answer to Rev. Deckard) about Nixon's attitude toward "smut," the President has come out and totally repudiated the *government* study of pornography and obscenity. Not merely questioned the results, but came right out and said—"I don't care what this report found, I *know* what I'm going to do!" Incredible! Almost as incredible, in fact, as the fact that a typically conservative

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government commission came up with such "advanced" and rational ideas. But it shall be to no avail, as it isn't politically "right" today and Nixon is always a politician first.

Most gratifying to see you mention Huxley's *Island*, Ted. Now of course I wasn't around when it came out originally, but even so, I'm amazed at the total lack of material on this novel in either the fan or the mundane press. I recall when researching a paper on Huxley in high school that commentary was large and extensive on *Brave New World*, Huxley's anti-utopia and anti-drug novel; but there was little or no comment about *Island*, in which drugs are used to provide a new and greater insight into life and man's existence. This wasn't a popular topic when it came out (I thought, but could be mistaken, that it was around 1959, rather than a few years later), but although it is now, still there has been no comment. Strange.

Jerry Lapidus
54 Clearview Drive
Pittsford, N.Y., 14534

My collection is still in boxes, so I can't verify the date Island *was first published, but the paperback copy came out in 1963. It was reviewed in the popular press when it was originally published—but largely unfavorably. The most frequent criticism was one with which I'd concur: the fiction suffered while the message prospered. It was too much a tract and too little a novel. However, if you're looking for a utopian guide for your life-style,* Island *is not only more explicit than* Stranger in a Strange Land, *it's better worked out and doesn't rely upon alien magic. I might add that I don't think Huxley's bias towards the psychedelic drugs hurt the book's reception at the time. The anti-LSD scare was whipped up later, largely in reaction—outright fear—to Dr. Leary's proselytizing. (Presently LSD is enjoying the same sort of hysterical campaign by the "authorities" that was waged against marijuana in the late thirties—and with about as little justification.) —TW*

Dear Ted,

The debate on the drug issue is shaping up nicely. You're bound to get complaints from The Silent (?) Majority. Those of us who are neither militant nor reactionary thank you kindly for the first rational approach to the subject in a long, long time.

Help! Please. I am aware of the existence of an individual designated "Richard Lupoff," but what (or who) is "Ova Hamlet"? Is this a person or a pen-name. Who is writing *Sacred Locomotive Flies?* In other words: for the benefit of we who have not been in on this business from the beginning, could you please (in 25 words of less) clear the air of confusion? Thank you.

Has *Axe and Dragon* been published in paperback?

Dan Davidson
P.O. Box 75
Huntsport, N.S., Canada

To answer your last question first, yes. As The Time Bender, *by Berkley Books. As for Ova, perhaps the editorial this issue will answer your question. She's (mostly) a pen-name. (That's less than 25 words—unless you count those in the editorial . . .) —TW*

Dear Ted:

I was reading the latest issue of *FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION* the other night, and recalled that the Mercury Press (the publisher of *F & SF*) periodically offers color prints of *F & SF* covers to their readers—at a nominal

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price, of course.

Why doesn't AMAZING and FANTASTIC do the same? *F & SF* frequently has very attractive cover paintings, done by some of the best artists in the business, but so do your two magazines, Ted. In fact, I like many of your cover paintings much more than any I've ever seen on the covers of F & SF.

On the table before me, I have five issues of your two magazines: three of AMAZING (May and Sept. 1970, and Jan. 1971); and two of FANTASTIC (August and Dec. 1970).

Were the cover prints of these five issues available to your readers, *sans* the overprinting, I believe they would sell. I know *I* would buy them. If they were made suitable for framing, they would make quite an attractive set of wall decorations.

Mike Kaluta's cover illustration for the December FANTASTIC was definitely great. And as you pointed out, it is very suggestive of the work done by Jeff Jones and Mike Hinge (more Jones than Hinge, I think), yet with its own, distinctive patterns of originality. It was very well done.

Comparing the art style of good cover illustrators, though, is like trying to compare the writing styles of good authors with each other; you just can't do justice to either of the styles being compared. This especially holds true when a person or group of persons become so immersed in comparing one writer's style to another's, that they completely forget to look for any originality in the works they are comparing. Or they concentrate on a work's short-comings (which may be few) and ignore its over-all value. Unfortunately, the latter occurs more often than the former, though both are undesirable.

Each painter or writer has touches of originality to a style that makes that style distinctively *his*.

Really, the entire December issue of FANTASTIC was great. Alexei Panshin's column was interesting and informative (aren't they all?), to me at least. Someday he should take these columns and bind them into a comprehensive text (with appropriate, anthologized stories) for creative writing or literature courses on the college level. An appropriate title could be (what else?): "Science Fiction in Dimension."

Your selection of stories for this issue was very good. I especially enjoyed Barry N. Malzberg's "The New Rappacini." Anxiously, I await the conclusion of Keith Laumer's "The Shape Changer," but reserve any criticisms I have of that story until then.

The first thing I noticed about the Jan. 1971 AMAZING was the type size. It looked larger, and sure enough, it was. But not that much. I'm glad it was able to be done without sacrificing the excellent features, and assume the same can be expected with the next issue of FANTASTIC. I'm pleased to see it, and I'm certain a number of your other readers will feel the same way.

Gene Van Troyer
1511 SE Mall
Portland, Oregon 97202

PS: Congratulations on the new addition to your family, Ted!

Thank you. Actually, I was a bit stunned by the response of so many of you to my announcement of the birth of our daughter in the January AMAZING—and I thank you all. As for the covers, this is, unfortunately, unworkable—and I wish I could have type-free copies of those covers myself! F&SF uses a different printer and

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printing method, whereby the entire cover painting is shot and "proved" separately for color before the type is added (or dropped out, actually). This results in a "run" of type-free cover prints, a number of which I have myself (from my period on the editorial staff of that magazine). Our engraver presently prepares for us only a single set of color transparencies—and these include the type as an integral part of the cover. No copies are actually printed to "prove up" the engraving until the printer (World Color Press) runs off the entire cover, front and back, inside and out. We usually get a few extras of these, but that's all. (And, please—don't ask for them; we use them ourselves.)

Dear Ted:

Which magazine should I give my '71 Hugo vote to—AMAZING or FANTASTIC? We've got to get that coordinated now, so you can *win*, instead of splitting your votes and letting JWC put extra stress on his mantle (it can only hold so much).

David Stever
7 Lake Rd.
Cochituate, Mass., 01778

Ideally, I'd suggest voting your own evaluation of the "Best" sf magazine. But if you're torn between AMAZING and FANTASTIC, I can understand your problem, since I tend to think of each magazine as a complementary part of the other. I don't think I should be the one to suggest your choice, but if AMAZING was to win a Hugo, I'd be very happy—it would be that magazine's first. (And maybe next year, if you still feel the same way about the magazines, you could vote for FANTASTIC . . . .) Win or lose, we're pleased to be in contention for sf's top award again, and that's what counts. —Ted White

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 65)

seek mine own revenge against these two foul traitors."

"He's the one," Blodwen broke in, "he ate and drank and filled a room, and now he must pay."

"Pay?" I gasped, amazed. "Pay? Twas the foul sorcerer who robbed my stash and who then offered me his hospitality at this inn!"

"Never heard of the bum," saith Domesticus, turning toward the Reeve. "I just dropped by to visit my cousin Blodwen and her old daddy, Quinsana."

"What?" I choked. "Then stand and defend your foul selves!" Thus saying I reached for Punkzapper and Hoodsticker, only to recall that they had been stolen from me along with my boots, Fred and Ed.

The Reeve siezed me by one shoulder, the sorcerer by the other. "Come along, kid," quoth Quinsana. "A little spell with the Trigs'll straighten you out. I'll see to it that they set you free as soon as you come to full manhood, so you can become a decent, bill-paying citizen."

I screamed, kicked and struggled all the way to the Shire Reeve's cart. The guardsman at the gate recognized me as we left Poughkeepsie and followed us screaming that the Duke would demand his tribute if ever I dared set foot in the city again.

My lovely she-horse Heroine was seized to pay my debts.

But Upchuck does not forget, nor will he be forgotten. Somehow I will endure my vile servitude until I am able to escape, and new chronicles of Upchuck of Secaucus will see print, if but ever again I can find an editor mad enough to purchase them!

—Ova Hamlet
(as told to Richard Lupoff)

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57)

occasionally, Mr. Wayburn. Besides casual sales of drawings, that is."

"Call me Skip, will you? Everybody else does. Complicates matters here, it meaning 'ship' in Norwegian though pronounced about the same as the English word . . . Yeah, I have gotten commissions here and there. I've grown a tad cautious about accepting them, after some trouble one landed me in, a couple years back."

"What happened?"

"Longish story."

"I've nothing to hurry for."

Good! That means she's enjoying this chatter of mine. Keep it up, boy.

"Well, you see," he began, "I chanced through a tiny Southern town, not Byworld exactly, but more fundamentalist than is easy to believe in this day and age. In fact, everything there was half a century or worse out of date. They even had a jukebox in the diner—ever seen one? The Sigman, by being rude enough to exist, had upset the faithful like a tornado. They had a reaction going that would've put a Colossus rocket in Lunar orbit. I fell talking with the owner of that diner. He meant to close for a week and call on his relatives elsewhere. I suggested he let me brighten his bleak little place while he was away. We settled on a price for a Bible scene.

"I didn't let anybody in before the grand unveiling, and I cooked and slept there when the fever had really grabbed me. I did patronize my friendly neighborhood moonshiner. First time I came back from him, I looked at what I'd begun, and realized what a noble opportunity I was missing. All that space, and I planned to do the Sermon on the Mount? Ridiculous! Not that Jesus lacks possibilities, but I haven't clarified them for myself and see no sense in copying someone else's ideas.

"When I woke next morning the zeal was still in me, proving that however drunk she was last night and hung over today, my Muse was authentic. I laid in a supply of jugs and for the rest of that week, half out of my head from lack of proper food and sleep, plus superabundance of corn squeezin's, I painted the best thing I'd ever done, maybe the best I'll ever do, the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

"Angels in the four corners, ceiling high, emptied vials of wrath upon the jukebox, the television set, and the doors to the ladies' and gents' rooms. God the Father burned with glory on that ceiling; His long white hair and beard tossed in the storm of destruction, like His robes, and His face was half human, half lion. The Son on His right hand was less successful—I wanted to show that He pitied the damned He was helping cast into eternal flame—well, He came out more like a grimly satisfied revivalist saying, 'I told you so.' The flames around the thrones—not hellflames, mind you; modeled on solar prominences—reached up around the Holy Ghost, whose wings carried their leap further. Gabriel I modeled on a film I'd once seen, a trumpeter way back in the jazz era, Bix Biederbecke; he was obviously blowing riffs, syncopating, having the time of his immortal life. The rest of the angels, the elders, the whole divine crew, were distracted by his concert. Some were

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annoyed, trying to concentrate on their work, but a couple were listening in totally goofed-out ecstasy. Me, I had the time of *my* life with the zoo around the throne . . . I'm babbling."

"No, no, do continue," she said, her gaze never leaving him.

"M-m, well, etymology aside, why should murals not include floors, considering how tough the modern paints are? This floor became Earth. The dead were rising out of it. You saw tombstones falling, graves opening, the whole scene chaotic since I guessed that by Judgment Day every spot on the planet will've been used a thousand times for burials. I doubted the resurrection of the flesh would be instantaneous, so I showed different stages—a recent corpse still half rotten, a skull rolling to rejoin its vertebrae, two skeletons squabbling over a shinbone, ancient dust starting to whirl into the first ghostly outlines . . . And the completed cases! I didn't try for tragic dignity, like the Orpheus Fountain in Stockholm. Revelations is a wild book, utter lunacy. The weaker among the resurrected were painfully trying to haul themselves upright with the help of the counter stools. A couple of lovers were crying for joy in each other's arms, yes, but they were old when they died. Remembering that in heaven is no marriage, a young couple was trying to sneak a quick—ah—well, a cowboy and an Indian were kicking and gouging, and you can imagine the rest.

"Along the lower part of the front wall I put a distant view of burning cities, floods, earthquakes, and similar calamities, including a lightning bolt that struck a fundamentalist church. On the right wall, the saved were whirling upward like dry leaves in a cyclonic wind. Most I modeled on happy drunks, happy potheads, et cetera, but some looked dubious, some bewildered, one was thoroughly airsick. Naturally, everyone was naked. Scripture says nothing about restoring shrouds. On the left wall, the damned were similarly tumbling downward. Hellflames were roaring aloft to greet them, and the first few had begun to sizzle, oh, that was not nice. Nor were the devils who hurried them along. I'll spare you details. Satan himself was better-looking, in an ophidian way. One hand reached out to rake the sinners in, the other made a fist at God, middle finger extended.

"Behind the counter, for the delectation of the trade, was a further view of the opposition, the Great Whore of Babylon on her beast. I wrote the number of the beast in binary. She was glad-eyeing the Antichrist, and I made it perfectly obvious what he had in mind . . . No, sorry, I don't want to offend you."

Skip's apology was *pro forma*. She was giggling. "Oh, my, oh, my," she said. "How did the town react?"

"A-wing and awash as I was, it never occurred to me they mightn't appreciate my masterpiece." Skip sighed. "I had to justify my nickname for sure, that day." *Not the first or last time I was glad to be good at karate and kendo.* "No doubt the owner repainted."

She sobered. He realized that the verve of his account had been due to more than gusto, and that she noticed

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this. "Odd," she said slowly. "I never met anybody before who had art in the blood."

"Takes the strangest forms," he tried to quip. His reference escaped her.

"Competent illustrators, of course," she went on. Her gaze moved from him to the water and back. "Two or three who bragged about their dedication and were not competent. None were real artists, the way I've known several bone-real musicians and scientists. Until you today."

Dare I take the opening? Yes—carefully, carefully. Jet back the microsecond she registers distaste for the subject. "I thank you," he drawled. "Me, however, I suspect no person alive, no human who ever lived short of maybe a Rembrandt or a Bach, compares in . . . artistness? . . . to Earth's distinguished guest."

Did she flinch? He couldn't quite tell. But raised brows questioned him.

"The Sigman." Skip pointed skyward at random.

"Well, m-m, Canter—" she couldn't help blushing—"Canter does, you know, appear to have proved the being insists an esthetic standard be met. Like, say, a Heian Period Japanese nobleman."

"Not what I'm getting at, though Dr. Canter's work does suggest my notion may not be too skewed."

"What is your idea?" Now she was merely being courteous, he assumed; yet she didn't sound resigned.

He was reminded of how you played a game fish on a thin line. "Aw, nothing much." He turned, leaned on the rail, stared out across the waves. "A sigaroon-type idea."

She moved to stand beside him. "Go on, Skip. Do."

He struggled to sound calm. "Maybe I'm dead wrong," he said. "I think I know what the Sigman came for, what it's doing, why it's hardly paid attention to us, how we can make it sit up and wag the tail it hasn't got and declare that nothing is too good for the human race. Extravagant of me, no?"

He risked a sidelong glance. The profile that intrigued him was turned seaward, the ponytail fluttering back in a strengthened breeze. He hadn't scared her off. She did grip the rail tightly, and her voice was a trifle strained: "Tell me."

—to be concluded—

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 113)

there. But the future and outer space can serve as the means of forcing an entire range of differences in perception, and we have spent the last forty years in discovering some few of these.

The purpose of the literature of outer-space-and-the-future—what I have been calling *creative fantasy* in these columns, but which we might call *speculative fantasy* if we want to retain the familiar and useful "sf" initials—is alteration of perception. Seen in this way, sf is less a genre, a thing-in-itself, than a strategy that uses difference and distance to allow you to see a different world.

Sf is a means of expanding consciousness. I'll pursue the implications next time.

—Alexei Panshin

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 81)

shakily to his feet, smoke acrid in his nostrils. Harriet Mandible and Wendell were pounding on the other side of the door. Moonfleet barked furiously. Under the window of 491 bulked an eldritch object that twitched briefly in the diluted moonlight and then was still.

Houghman unlocked the door and turned on the light.

"I have heard of werewolves," said Harriet later in her apartment, "but never anything like this." She shivered, thinking of the unlocked room with the body (or whatever) sprawled in the corner—the tall and muscular man, his hirsute body blending strangely at shoulders and feet into walnut veneer and coil springs.

Houghman sipped from his glass of chianti. "Werewolves are virtually extinct," he said, "but their contemporary counterparts have evolved. That klutz tonight, for instance. He was evidently part of the shipment of new furniture you put in the rooms back in July."

"But what *was* he?" asked Harriet.

Houghman sipped thoughtfully. "You're on to lycanthropes—the wolf-man of werewolf, right? What got laid on us tonight was a lectusthrope, a were-bed, or a man who turns into a bed, or vice-versa. Whatever you want to call him."

"Holy Hachiman," said Wendell. "That scattergun sure got to him, boss."

"Yeah." Houghman smiled. "Dynamite. That twenty-gauge double load of silver dust at close range'll waste about any freaky demon." He chuckled. "Really kicky."

"Silver dust?" Harriet was dismayed.

"Yeah, took a little bread there."

Harriet smiled weakly. "Well, put it on your expense account."

"I did."

Silence descended like a dusty stage curtain.

"I think," said Houghman, wiping his nose with his sleeve. "I ought to buy a handkerchief tomorrow."

—Ed Bryant

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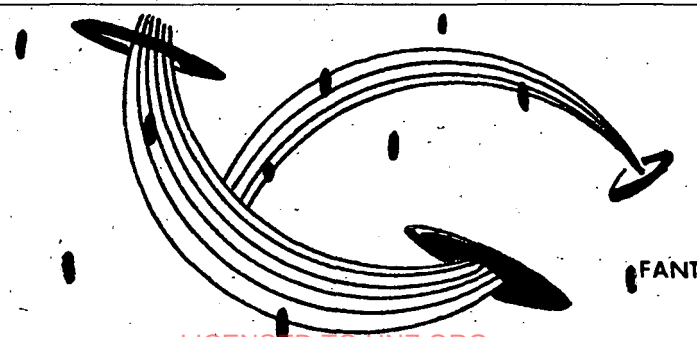

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

various other members of that small regional conference, announced he had the perfect title for an Ace novel—*War of the Doom Zombies*. As the weekend progressed, so did the plot, as elaborated by various among the others in attendence. At some point not long after, Lupoff realized he had a "real" story—and ultimately he wrote an outline of it and submitted it to Don Wollheim—at Ace Books. "I mean, why not?" he said later. "It was *supposed* to be the ultimate Ace Book, wasn't it?"

Unfortunately, Don did not agree, and Lupoff took his outline elsewhere, selling it to Larry Shaw at Lancer Books. It was published in 1967 as *One Million Centuries*. The change in title reflected the change in intent and direction the novel had undergone. In its final and published form it bore only a passing resemblence to the *War of the Doom Zombies*, the creation of which had been so entertaining for us years earlier.

In 1968, at about the same time that I found myself assuming the editorial chair of this magazine, Lupoff wrote a pair of satirical stories for Terry Carr's infrequent but prestigious fanzine, LIGHTHOUSE. (This fanzine is *so* infrequently published that although Carr still insists it has not died, it has published no issues since 1968 . . .) Hearing about them, I asked if I might see them. I liked one of them—a satire on Judy Merril's *England Swings SF*, complete with introductory blurbs—so well that I immediately bought it for publication here: "Man Swings SF", October, 1969. (The other one? It was also aimed at an anthology, Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions*, and included characteristic introductions, etc. But none of us—Lupoff, Carr and myself—thought it nearly as good.)

And there it ended . . . we assumed . . .

. . . Wrongly.

"Man Swings SF" brought in a surprisingly large amount of mail, and all of it affirmative. Most of those who wrote said, simply, "We need more satire like this in the field." I agreed. I began suggesting to Lupoff at odd moments (some of them *very* odd) that Ova Hamlet consider another story for FANTASTIC. "Why not a Jerry Cornelius story?" was about the way I put it. "You know—all those irrelevent quotes, headlines, that sort of stuff. The whole *NEW WORLDS* bit."

And, after some time had passed, "Music in the Air" (August, 1970) arrived in the mail. And at this point things began to get out of hand.

For openers, Lupoff decided he had another novel in the making. "Music in the Air," with the protagonists' names changed and the irrelevant quotes removed, became the first chapter of *Sacred Locomotive Flies*. So also, "Battered Like a Brass Bippy," the next Ova Hamlet opus, a satire on Harlan Ellison's "Shattered Like a Glass Goblin" (a story universally admired by all save Lupoff and yours undersigned). "Battered Like a Brass Bippy" (December, 1970)—unlike the previous Hamlet story—was born of Lupoff's own savage will, and had, I think, more teeth in it. When he phoned me to inform me that the story was in the mail to me, Lupoff added, "I think I've got another Ova Hamlet story in me."

By this point, you'll note, I was no longer required to egg him on and supply inspiration.

"What's it about?" I asked, assuming an air of innocence.

"Upchuk the Barbarian," he replied as

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sprightly as the telephone line would allow.

"Aha!" said I. "A sword and sorcery epic, to be sure!"

"A *short* sword and sorcery epic," he allowed.

"Have you a title yet?"

"Not really. I haven't gotten that far into it yet."

"I have a suggestion," I said softly, my mind stirring with old memories of days by the empty swimming pool at the Diplomat motel in Washington, D.C., of Lin Carter posturing heroically on the motel roof, and of the endless party that the Disclave always was in its halcyon days.

"Yes?" Lupoff inquired . . .

There may or may not be more Ova Hamlet stories after this one. The Lupoffs live in Berkeley now, and the parties which see us both in attendance are much fewer. Whether Mrs. Hamlet rises again to do battle with the archetypes of our field will depend upon other signs and augurs.

But, to be serious for a moment, I think she has served us well. The sixties was a decade of a too-earnest seriousness about our field—a decade in which some among us strove for literary importance (and too often succeeded only in pretentiousness) and others launched manifestoes in defense of the future or the past. The best of these were scholarly, and the worst unmannerly catterwaulings. None exhibited the least trace of humor.

But whether we care to admit it or not, our field *is* a pimple upon the arse of the Public, largely ignored, occasionally scratched absent-mindedly, and this is a condition best accepted with a leavening of humor. On wry.

If Richard Lupoff and Ova Hamlet have given us back a little of our ability to laugh at ourselves, then they (he) have done a wonderful and notable thing. Others are now inspired to similar irreverence—one such, sharing this issue, is Ed Bryant; another, back soon, is George Alec Effinger. I don't mean to suggest that humor, or satire, should become the staples of our field—but surely a little laughter is not amiss in times like these.

Footnote: One person sorely in need of the saving grace of laughter is Richard Lupoff, whose novel, *Sacred Locomotive Flies,* has had more difficulties finding a publisher than anyone might consider reasonable. The last I heard, the novel, after being accepted by one publisher, was slated for more prestigious publication, only to lose both in a sudden shift of editors. Exactly who *will* publish it is (as I write this) still up in the air, but I'll let you know when the information becomes available. Watch this space.

—Ted White

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 69)

bald scalp. Up to the window to watch the evening settle over the pet store opposite his house, back down to the couch, back to the window. He stopped to catch the evening breeze. Night sifted down. Out in space a few lonely sparks pierced the infinite dark: the planets. He wondered if there was life on any of them, or if Man was alone in an empty universe. As the street lights came on all at once, he turned away, stuck a cigarette in his mouth and set the end on fire.

The smoke spiraled up from his cigarette . . .

—Hank Stine
& Larry Niven

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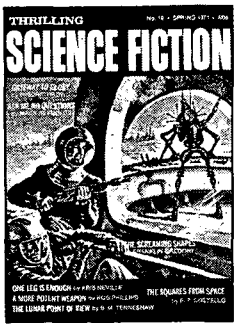

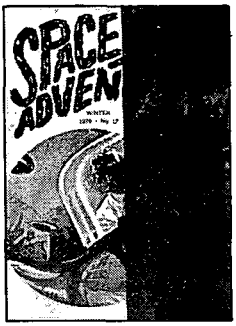

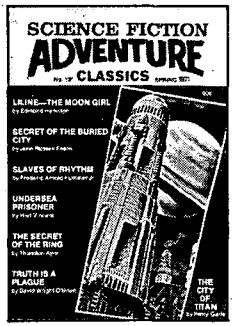

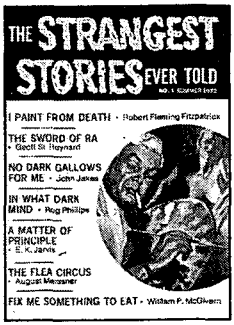
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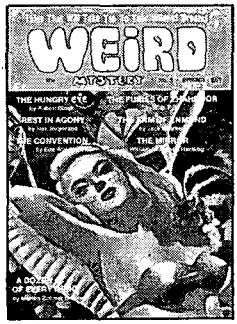

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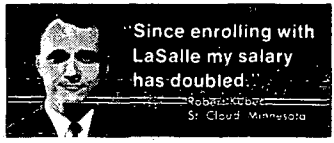

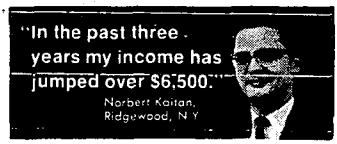

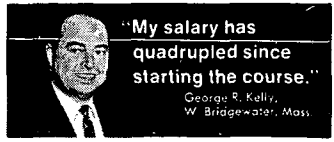

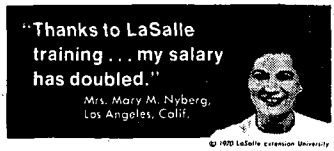

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